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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

The Latest Mike Shayne Mystery

DAY OF REVENGE

By Brett Halliday

A Suspenseful Novelet

A GREEK'S WAY

by Jerry Jacobson

Short Stories

by Authors of

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DAY OF REVENGE

by Brett Halliday

The Miami natives were restless, ready to revolt into a full-scale riot—and Mike Shayne found himself right in the middle of the fight! 4

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Shayne gripped his .38 tightly and waited. He hadn't intended to doze off, but he did—and when he heard the click, his eyes shot wide open—to stare into the familiar muzzle of a .45!

Day of Revenge

by BRETT HALLIDAY

LEIGH BRAVERMAN STARED DOWN HER OUTSTRETCHED arm, sighting over the top of her martini glass at the setting sun as though it were a target. Slowly she squeezed her trigger finger as her daddy had taught her long ago and clicked her tongue.

"Take that, Tony," she screamed at the roaring surf, "and see if I care."

But damn. That was the trouble—she did care. She cared about her husband a lot. No, he wasn't the best husband by a damned sight, and he wasn't the best she could have done, but she loved him nonetheless.

She walked across the bougainvillea-scented veranda, this time a little less steady than the time before. She filled her glass with gin, reached for the vermouth, and thought better.

"How dry is it?" she said loudly to herself, knowing full well that the only voice she had heard around their house lately was her own echo. Well, at least the company was good.

The evening was still hot for Miami Beach in October, or maybe it was all the Gilbey's anti-freeze. She had started drinking even before the evening news came on with all those dreadful stories about a riot in Overton. She hoped it wouldn't be another summer like the last when she and all her friends had ridden around with their windows locked and had absolutely refused to go to the mainland.

But Tony, did he care that she was frightened? No, he was probably doing the usual and driving around aimlessly, unable to come home. Her best friend Virginia had told her it was another woman, but Leigh didn't believe that. He had told her straight to her face that he had never played around, and she believed him. Yes, Tony Braverman was a lot of things, but being a liar was not one of them.

Suppose he had run into trouble driving across town. Suppose they had yanked a white man out of his car . . .

Leigh reloaded her martini glass.

She was watching the sun plunge into the ocean, half listening for the fizzles, when she heard the garage door opener, then the sound of the 350SL. Her stomach turned a full loop. Lately she didn't know what was worse—having him home or not having him home.

She knew the whole routine so well she felt like his choreographer. He would grab a beer—always a Bud—from the refrigerator; he still hadn't learned to drink like an executive. Next he would put one of his old albums on the stereo—probably *The Byrds' Greatest Hits* or some such. Then he'd sip his beer, light up a little grass, and mellow out on a book like Hunter Anson's *History of the Beatles*. Lately he had gotten so nostalgic he'd even make a phone call to one of his old friends.

Old friends, crap. She and Tony had been to a reunion in L.A. five years ago. She had wanted to see the sights—Sunset Boulevard, a Hollywood movie studio, Malibu—but he had checked into a hotel and stayed there, eating only from room service. His friends were scruffy, refusing to realize that hippies were dead. They still lived in a commune in Utah and spoke in glowing terms of the life of the soil and the advantages of vegetables.

The one condition on which he had let her accompany him was a promise that she would not reveal to them that he had been made a Vice-President in Charge of Research and Development. One night when his friends had fallen asleep in their room—on the floor, of course—she had followed him downstairs to a deserted ballroom.

Tony had gone to a single spot, stood, and moved only his eyes. It was as though he were watching an invisible movie. Finally he had noticed her.

"I was standing right here," he had begun, "when it happened. Rafer Johnson was just to my left. It was a moment of triumph, the winning of the California Primary. An impossible dream was soon to be realized. Then suddenly this guy appeared out of the crowd and pulled the trigger. Poof; it was over."

Now Tony was probably the only corporate executive in America with a picture of Robert Kennedy behind his desk.

She had guessed wrong, she knew as she heard Mick Jagger lamenting "I can't get no satisfaction." Then she heard her husband yelling from their recently remodeled kitchen.

"Leigh, where the hell are you?"

She shivered as the last piece of warmth dropped into the ocean. Maybe tonight he would be willing to talk. How long could a man brood? Fifteen years?

She walked slowly across the veranda, her heels in counterpoint to the Rolling Stones. Why did Tony have to be different? If he didn't want to make all the cocktail parties, that was O.K. But some of them—that was all she wanted.

As she opened the sliding glass door, she wondered for the millionth time if she should have had a baby.

"There you are," he said.

His tie hung limply from his neck, and the bags under his eyes looked like somebody had added a pound of cement since he had left for work. His hair was disheveled and starting to creep over his white collar. He reminded her of those pictures of him they had looked at in Los Angeles.

"Honey," she said deliberately, "I called Dr. Wayman and made an appointment. He was busy, but said he could squeeze you in tomorrow as a personal favor."

Leigh noticed he was still clutching his calfskin briefcase. Usually he dropped it off in his study before seeing her.

"He's not who I should see," said her husband.

What was it Dr. Wayman had told her? "There's a little of Peter Pan in all men." In Tony there was a lot, but his Neverneverland was the 60s. A whole lot had happened back then that she knew she would never be part of.

He staggered toward her, the dark black hair that had once so attracted her now flopped in his face. He pushed it aside. His black eyes seemed loose in their sockets, just bouncing around in there.

"It's ripping me apart," he said. Slurred words had replaced the crisp New England accent. "I can't take it any longer. I've got to do something about it."

He threw the briefcase down on the dining room table, knocking the silver vase to the floor and spilling the rose arrangement on the teak.

"Tony," she said.

"I've learned the hard way it doesn't matter what a man does," he interrupted. "Somebody else can wipe it out like that."

He threw one of the hybrid roses on the floor and stepped on it.

"Honey," Leigh said, trying to hide her fear, "let me call Fred

Wayman now. He only lives a few doors down. Lydia said they'd be home tonight . . ."

"That Turk in L.A. had it right, that racist in Memphis, even Lee Harvey," he said. "There's only one solution."

When he opened the briefcase, Leigh Braverman was terrified. Her husband had been so non-violent that he wouldn't even go after the Peterson's Irish Setter that turned over their trashcans nightly.

Now Tony, the husband who still had on their dresser a black armband with a peace symbol, was holding a shiny pistol.

She ran. Her daddy had taught her to defend herself and that she could handle anything, but the sight of Tony's lily-white fingers grasping a gun was as alien as anything she had ever seen.

She ran toward the bedroom. Why she had chosen it she didn't know. A spike fell off, but she kept running. This was no ball and Prince Charming was armed.

She started to close the door.

That's when the gun went off.

II

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE TIMES WHEN SHAYNE HAD TO agree with those guys in the beer commercial—"It don't get no better." The recently repaired air conditioner had lowered the room temperature to a comfortable 72 degrees. The popcorn was still hot from the popper, and without Lucy around to lecture on the evils of cholesterol, he felt totally conscience-free as he drowned the crisp kernels with a full pint of melted butter. He reached into the freezer and pulled out a can of nearly frozen Lite—when it came to his body, maybe he wasn't totally conscience-free, but the favorite of Butkus and Bubba was certainly good enough for a mere Miami shamus.

He heard the familiar four-bar opening to MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL as he came out of the kitchen and sat down in the moth-eaten chair that Lucy had just returned to the Salvation Army for the fourth time and he had reclaimed again. The Dolphins were on the crest of a four-game winning streak as they rode into Buffalo. The big redhead had just wrapped up the Spayne case, his beautiful secretary was visiting her sister, and he was taking a few days off to clear the cordite from his nostrils. Not even Cosell could ruin an evening like this.

The Dolphins were ramming the opening kickoff down the Bills' throats and Dandy Don had just said "Hi" to Jeff and Hazel in Mt. Vernon when Ma Bell's trained snake intruded into his Eden.

With the first ring, Miami's quarterback dropped back to pass.

With the second ring, Woodley spotted a streaking Duriel Harris. With the third, Gifford yelled, "He's got him open."

Shayne turned to pick up the phone.

The crowd went wild.

"Hello," he said, jerking his head around.

The network was promoting an upcoming LOVE BOAT.

"But the pass?" he asked the RCA.

"Mike, is that you?" said a female voice.

"This is Shayne. Listen, can I get back to you?"

"Mike, this is Leigh Braver . . . Leigh Burroughs."

"Leigh," he said, recognizing the voice.

Shayne got up and turned off the television set.

"I know," she said, "it's been seven years."

"I always wondered . . ."

"Mike, don't ask questions. You've got to come out here immediately." She gave him a Miami Beach address.

"Are you in trouble?" he said.

"Yes. It's my husband. I think he's trying to kill me."

THE REDHEAD URGED THE POWERFUL BUICK DOWN Collins Avenue as fast as he dared. It wouldn't help much if he had to spend time trying to talk one of Petey Painter's boys out of a ticket.

How urgent was her problem? Her voice had seemed on the edge of hysteria, yet he supposed that if her problem were that immediate, she'd have called the police:

So Leigh Burroughs was married. He had wondered about her since she had walked out of his life that day. Leigh Burroughs. Five-seventeen. Auburn hair. A complexion as smooth as Biscayne Bay on a windless June day. She had been a secretary for the insurance agency down the hall. The soft-drink machine on the first floor had been holding her quarters for ransom when his sharp blow to its midsection had loosened its stranglehold and opened their relationship.

They had shared Cokes and conversation on and off for several months. That had turned into lunches in the park. Leigh had always puzzled him. She seemed too smart, too pretty to spend eight hours a day nursemaiding insurance claims. Her conversations about Miami politics, though, were always punctuated by gossip about which secretary on the third floor was doing what with what junior executive on the fifth.

One day she hadn't shown at the park. Her boss just said that she had found another job uptown. Shayne knew that his relationship with her hadn't been the kind for him to go looking for her, yet he had

always sensed there was more to it than tunafish on rye.

The redhead turned onto Riviera Drive. The close-cropped St. Augustine grass and strategically placed trees and shrubs suggested to Shayne an upscale neighborhood—not corporate heads but guys who had had their keys to the executive washroom for awhile.

A white 350SL sat in the open garage. Behind it, a cloudless sky and a placid crescent drifting amidst an ocean of crystal lights implied all was right in the 75% tax bracket.

Shayne rang the bell. Chimes as clear as a church bell echoed through a seemingly empty house. He rang again.

Nothing.

Then, in the darkness, a muted shriek.

He rounded the stucco ranch-style to a slate veranda. Only a portable bar was visible in the pale moonlight. Like a moth the big detective was drawn to a light through the sliding glass door.

He peeked in. A distant glow produced a corona around a shadowy figure frozen in the midst of a hallway. Shayne's trained eye immediately fixed on the .45 in the man's hand.

Leigh Burroughs' terrified voice pierced the lapping of the ocean. "Tony, why are you doing this?"

The man didn't move.

Shayne tried the door. It was unlatched.

"Tony," she continued, her voice quivering, "why me? Why do you want to hurt me?"

Cautiously Shayne crept across the Florida Room's terrazo floor, staying in the shadows and moving silently as Greg Chen, his martial arts sensei, had taught him.

"Tony," she screamed, "why is everything coming apart?"

The man only stared at the gun quizzically as though it were a unique seashell he had just found on the beach.

Simultaneously Shayne's right hand sliced down like an axe on Tony's wrist and the redhead's shoulder plowed into his side like one of Shula's Killer B's sacking an unsuspecting quarterback.

The gun clattered to the floor. The two bodies rolled into a mahogany table, sending a large ceramic of a dove plummeting to the floor.

Leigh Braverman opened her bedroom door to see the big redhead sitting on her husband's chest. Just as Shayne cocked his right, she grabbed him and started clawing frantically.

"Don't hurt my husband, Mike," she begged.

Tony Braverman shoved both his hands into the redhead's chest, knocking him backwards. Shayne rolled over and tried to untangle

himself. She grabbed the detective like an upset cat clinging by all fours to the sofa and wouldn't let go. She was panting furiously, and Shayne could smell the gin on her breath.

Gently he pried her hands loose.

She suddenly went limp.

"What's going on, Leigh?" he said, helping her to her feet.

"I don't want Tony to hurt me, but I don't want you to hurt him either," she said. "He's really a gentle man, except something's wrong."

The redhead turned toward where Tony Braverman had been.

A diesel engine started up.

"Let him go," she said through pleading brown eyes. "He's not going to hurt me now."

As the redhead looked down on the floor, he wondered. Not only was her husband gone, but so was the .45 automatic.

III

LEIGH BRAVERMAN COLLAPSED ON A WHITE, CHROME-framed sofa. Shayne was no fashion critic, but he could tell from the fabric and cut of her dress that it wasn't off the rack. It had been seven years since he had last seen her, but the wrinkles around the beautiful woman's eyes made it seem like twenty.

"Fix me a drink, Mike," she said in a tired voice. "A strong one."

The redhead sat down across from her. "More liquor's not what you need. Why don't you tell me what's going on around here instead?"

She chewed on her carefully manicured nails. "Nothing more than the old cliche—one out of every two marriages sours."

"Not every bad marriage ends with one partner waving a gun at the other."

"Tony and I have had some problems. I mean, when I married him, he seemed to be just what I wanted. Young executive, flashy car, condo, boat on the weekends—what we secretaries used to call a perfect catch. But a few months after the wedding I began to see another side to him."

"What do you mean?"

"Tony was a brooder. You'd probably call him a Romantic—never satisfied with the present, always living in the past."

"What kind of past?"

"Believe it or not, Mr. Three-piece Suit spent the Sixties in a field jacket and bluejeans."

"A hippie."

"Bottled and corked in '68. Why, when he heard that John Lennon

had been shot, he disappeared into his room and did nothing but play old Beatle tapes—for three straight days."

"But what does that have to do with him standing outside your room waving a loaded .45?"

She buried her face in her hands. "That's what got me so worried. I could put up with the folk rock, the yellowed news clippings, the psychedelic posters, even the joints of marijuana, but about six months ago his everyday behavior changed radically."

"How?"

"Instead of coming home at night, he started taking long drives around town. Said he had to get in touch with himself. Then he started missing work, cancelling out of company parties, refusing to entertain guests. When I tried to get him to talk, he'd just say somebody like me would never understand."

Shayne rasped his left thumbnail across his stubble and stood up. "You don't need me, Leigh. It sounds like your husband has some problems that could best be treated by a professional."

She looked up at him with Bambi eyes. "Mike, I've tried that. He's told me repeatedly he won't go to a 'damned shrink'." She stood up and took hold of the redhead's right hand. "Mike, I do love him, and he is worth saving."

Shayne could feel the desperation transmitted through her fingertips. "What do you want me to do?"

"You're a detective, aren't you? Find out what's troubling him and help him, help me."

When he stared into her eyes, Shayne knew he should refuse her. "I'll see what I can do."

Leigh Braverman hugged him tightly.

Shayne pulled away and said, "It sounds like your husband's problem may have something to do with his job. Where does he work?"

THE NEXT MORNING SHAYNE STEERED THE BUICK through the iron gates past the huge steel sign announcing the main entrance to MICO CHEMICAL. Evidently for Tony Braverman, the company's slogan—"MICO and You, A Perfect Chemistry" didn't apply. The redhead didn't know what he would find out here. Hell, he didn't even know what he was looking for, but it seemed his best bet.

He told the security guard that he had an appointment with Braverman and was given a map and a badge good only for Building 12.

As the Buick wound around the narrow blacktop road, the redhead

noted the newness of the complex. Unlike those of most companies that had invaded southern Florida, MICO's tombstone-like buildings were surrounded by professional landscaping. The grounds were actually attractive even though the complex reminded the detective of a well-laid-out memorial garden without the perpetual flame. The Buick was the oldest car in the litter-free lot. The receptionist at Building 12 greeted Shayne with a smile and "Welcome to MICO."

A young woman in a blue blazer and white skirt—which seemed from the number of people wearing it to be the corporate uniform—guided him to the second floor. There she handed him off to another smiling secretary in a blue dress and white ascot.

"I'm sorry, Mr. . . ."

"Shayne."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne, but Mr. Braverman isn't in yet," she said.

He fired back, "Has he been making a habit of that?"

"Well, yes," she said, caught off-guard. Then recovering, she added, "Why don't I introduce you to our Mr. Long. He'll be able to help you, I'm sure."

Shayne was beginning to feel like a fumbled football that nobody wanted to recover. To his right a bright red door opened, and a blue-suited cuckoo popped out.

"Jack Long," he said, extending his grin and a hand. "Welcome to MICO. What can we do for you, Mr. Shayne?"

"I need to talk with Tony Braverman," said the redhead, trying to disguise his impatience.

"I'm afraid Tony isn't in."

"She told me that much," said Shayne, looking over at the now-busy secretary.

"Perhaps if you explained what you wanted I could . . ."

"I want Tony Braverman, pal. You two might dress alike, but you can't help me."

"If you and I could just talk," said Long.

"O.K., pal, what do you think is behind Braverman's recent absenteeism?"

Shayne knew he had hit a nerve. The blue-suit jerked as though he had touched a live wire. Then, just as quickly, Long reverted to type. "If you'll have a seat," he said, "I'll see what I can do."

FOR OVER AN HOUR SHAYNE SAT IN THE SPACIOUS REception room, knowing—even hoping—Braverman wouldn't show. The redhead's experience had taught him that he'd learn more by being a vacuum cleaner than an interrogator. Sometimes he stared at the

Great Moments in Chemistry Series of paintings that lined the blue and white walls. Sometimes he just listened to salesmen, to secretaries on their break, to junior execs. He kept turning the pages of the MIAMI DAILY NEWS, reading and rereading Tim Rourke's series on the recent outbreaks of violence in the ghetto. Against his will he found himself getting interested in his reporter friend's profiles of various leaders in Overton and Liberty City, but more importantly a picture of Tony Braverman began to form from all the scraps he gleaned.

An erratic executive, but a genius. A maverick in research methods, but successful. Suspected by some, but acknowledged by all. Till something went wrong. Maybe his hunch that Braverman's troubles were with his business would pay off.

As he sat watching a supposedly perpetual motion clock, and knowing all the while such a machine as well as his insight into Braverman were only theory, the redhead began to piece together his interest in the case. Leigh Braverman, someone he had cared about out of the past. Tony Braverman, a genius living in the past. The redhead couldn't help but recall Phyllis and how his wife had died tragically in childbirth. Yeah, he knew all about living in the past. Hadn't he tried to recapture it? Hadn't he gone back to the very apartment building they had shared before she died?

Hell no, Tony Braverman hadn't cornered the market on looking back.

The redhead suddenly remembered that he hadn't checked the paper to see if the Dolphins had made it five in a row. He was just flipping to the sports when Jack Long reappeared.

"Mr. Shayne," he said, "we are fairly certain Tony Braverman won't be coming in today."

"Suppose you let me be the judge of that, pal."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne," Long argued, "but it is not in the best interests of MICO that you remain here."

The redhead stood up quickly. He was living in the present again—very intensely. "Whatever happened to the customer's always right?" he said.

"Regrettably perhaps," answer Long, "that's yesterday's way of doing business."

"And what about the chemistry MICO and me had going, pal?"

"I'm sorry, but we need to clear this building. In fact, we may have tarried too long."

Shayne noticed that Long pressed something on his watch.

In seconds a blue-and-white-clad security force began to assemble. Shayne could see that the exposed nerve had become an open sore. He

counted five of them—three overweight and too fairly old. Good odds.

Perhaps he was mellowing, he thought as he said, "Maybe you're right. I'll come back some other time."

"Please do," said Long as the force began to close in on them. "Tony or I can give you a guided tour some other time."

As Shayne headed toward the elevator, the security force formed a loose phalanx around him. There was no doubt in the redhead's mind he had provoked them into over-reacting. Why, he wondered, getting on the Otis alone.

He got off on the first floor and smiled at the receptionist. Coming through the entrance was a tall, grey-haired man with a metallic briefcase, followed by two younger members of the security team.

Maybe, decided the redhead, he had stirred up more trouble than he had imagined.

IV

SHAYNE WASN'T EXACTLY SURE WHY HE HAD DECIDED to take the short-cut through the inner city to the DAILY NEWS. Maybe it was for the same reason he had resisted moving his Flagler Street office into the suburbs or to the Beach. This was the heart of the city, where it all had begun. It had character, vitality. No plastic glitter here, no preoccupation with who went to what party with whom. Life was raw—and that's the way the redhead liked it.

He passed a burned-out storefront. Almost two years and no attempt had been made to rebuild. Still, the place was home for several people. Standing on all the streetcorners were groups of teenagers. Some yelled obscenities, and some were so high they didn't even notice Shayne's intrusion into their territory. The young girls in gaudy outfits parading the concrete runway seemed more numerous than those at a junior league fashion show. People on every sidewalk spilled onto the streets, concrete evidence that the inner city was bursting at the seams. A lot of people were coming in and no one seemed to be leaving. No place to go, nothing to do. No past, no future.

A rock shattered Shayne's reverie and the Buick's right side window. Instinctively the redhead jerked up his right hand to protect his face.

"Get lost, honky," came the loud taunt as well as the broken glass.

The Buick swerved toward the curb. A kid playing stickball loomed directly in front of him. Shayne hit the brake and twisted the wheel violently. The Buick skidded to a halt a few feet from the startled centerfielder.

"You almost killed my sister's child," screamed a teenage girl in a sack dress who had been flirting with a couple of t-shirted boys.

Quickly people surrounded the Buick like ants closing in on a wounded insect.

"Gonna get Whitey," they chanted in unison as they rocked the car back and forth in a terrifying rhythm. A huge, young black approached the still-running car and swung a baseball bat down on the hood. Then again.

Shayne realized that he couldn't fight or talk his way out. Reaching beneath the dash, he flipped a switch. A siren whooped. Momentarily surprised, the crowd backed away.

Shayne shoved the transmission into reverse. The Buick lurched, painting the street with twin streaks of hot rubber.

For a block Shayne ripped down the blacktop on the wrong side. Then a right down a garbage-strewn alley and he was gone.

So much, he thought; for the scenic route.

SHAYNE SPOTTED THE SKELETAL FRAME IN THE MIDDLE of the hive-like newsroom. Mesmerized by the green glow of his VDT sat Tim Rourke. Usually when Shayne dropped in on his reporter friend, they could sit around casually and rap. But not today. The redhead sensed an unusual urgency in the atmosphere.

"What's going on, Tim?" asked Shayne.

"Partially another incident in the inner city," said the reporter without looking up from his flying fingers.

"What happened?"

"Residents claim some screwy white man tried to run down some kids. Half of Gentry's force is down there now trying to defuse the powderkeg."

"Hey, Paul Harvey," said Shayne, firing up a Camel, "you interested in the rest of the story?"

Rourke looked up and said, "Come again?"

Quickly Shayne filled him in on what had really taken place. While the redhead talked, the reporter typed away. When Shayne had finished, Rourke pushed his chair back from the terminal and bummed a cigarette.

"Mike, this situation's got us all puzzled. Yeah, we've had trouble in the ghetto before, but always a succession of cause and effect could be pinpointed. But, hell, this time I can't even throw a dart at the target."

"Beats me, Tim. The city's been quiet for so long I guess everybody kind of forgets about the old problems."

"Let me play detective for a minute, shamus," said Rourke.

"Be my guest."

"You ever heard of The Reverend Malachi Moses?"

"Only seen his face. Lately he's been getting more TV time than reruns of M*A*S*H."

"That's the strange thing. The guy's become the unofficial spokesman for the minority community—heads up some group called CLAIM, but . . . well . . . look at this." The reporter reached over and punched his keyboard.

No more than a dozen lines popped up on the screen. "See that first date," said the reporter. "Six months ago. The guy has no past. And my contacts on the street can give me nothing."

Shayne drew deeply on the Camel and exhaled. "If I hear anything, you'll be the first to know. Meantime, let me ask you a couple of questions."

"Shoot."

"What can your magic machine tell me about MICO?"

Again the Irish reporter pushed a couple of keys. A financial report appeared. "Almost a blue-chip stock," said Rourke, "but their earnings have been off the last few years. Burns in Finance would recommend sell."

He hit a couple of other keys. "Miami Chemical peaked during the Vietnam conflict. It was one of the chief suppliers of napalm and other such goodies for the army. Then they got image conscious. I guess I would have too if I had demonstrators marching on every plant, interrupting production. MICO diversified. Got into everything from garden sprays to plastics. Nowadays they pretty much keep a low profile."

"See if your electronic crystal ball has anything on Tony B-R-A-V-E-R-M-A-N, Jack L-O-N-G, or any noteworthy activity of MICO in the last few months."

Rourke scrolled the computer. "Nothing, shamus, except Braverman was promoted to Veep in charge of Research and Development five years ago."

"Thanks, Tim. That makes us even."

The reporter stubbed out his butt and rolled back to his terminal. "Look, Mike, I'd love to shoot the breeze with you but . . ."

"I know," said the big detective. "A real hurricane's brewing out there, and you want to get to its eye."

INSTINCTIVELY SHAYNE HAD HEADED FOR HIS OFFICE till he realized it was closed and he was supposed to be taking a short vacation. It felt strange coming back to his hotel-apartment in the middle of the day.

As soon as he reached the door, he sensed something was wrong. He

drew the .38, pushed the door open with his foot, and ducked in.

It wasn't a bullet that caught the redhead. His apartment looked as though that hurricane had already struck.

V

SHAYNE WAS MYSTIFIED. BY THE TIME HE HAD PUT THE last pair of socks back in the drawers, he was convinced nothing was missing. Neither Spenser, the clerk on the desk, nor his neighbors had seen or heard a thing. That suggested pros, but he had watched Pegasus and Jones, his friends with The Company, search a room and leave it so even the cleaning lady wouldn't have been able to tell anybody had been there.

Was somebody sending him a message?

There was an off-chance that his visitors had been old acquaintances with an old grudge, but the odds favored someone connected to 1) the incident in the ghetto, or 2) MICO.

He was pouring some Martell into a spotted snifter and pondering his choices when the phone rang.

"Mike, it's Leigh." The voice was almost as panic-stricken as the night before. "Please come out here quickly."

"Are you all right?" Shayne said, feeling an upward surge in his stomach.

"Yes, but something's happened."

WHEN LEIGH BRAVERMAN OPENED THE FRONT DOOR, SHE was wearing red-silk lounging pajamas and a matching robe. Shayne stepped into her parlor.

"Oh, Mike," she said, throwing her arms around the redhead, "I need something to hold on to."

The detective felt the warmth of her full body seeping into him. This time he didn't push her away.

Her lips started nuzzling his neck, and her palms began to massage his back as if searching for something.

"Oh, Mike," she said, suddenly jerking her head back, "am I crazy for what I'm doing?"

"I think for a second there we were both inmates in the same asylum," answered the redhead.

"What do you mean?"

Shayne put some physical space between them. "Maybe we were both looking for a past that never was." He torched a Camel and offered her one. She refused, a confused look on her face. "I'm not the kind of guy who spends a lot of time wondering about might-have-

beans," he explained, "but after you left the way you did—so quickly—I couldn't help thinking about what was at the end of that path you and I were walking down."

She crossed her arms over her chest as if she were cold or suddenly embarrassed. "If it's time to bare our souls, you're going to have to slide over in the confessional."

"Why?"

"Damn you, Mike Shayne. Do I have to spell it out for you? I fell in love with you that day at the Coke machine, but just about as quickly I realized your feelings for Lucy. The best I was ever going to get from you was your willingness to share not my life, but half my tunafish sandwich."

The redhead smiled.

"Why do you think I just dropped out of your life?" she continued. "Because I got a better job? No way. I walked out while I still could and settled for second best, Tony. So in a way this whole situation is your fault, and you've got to get me out of it."

Shayne didn't bother pointing out the holes in her logic. They both saw through them. Right now something was more pressing. "Why'd you get me out here?"

"Half of me was desperate to seduce you, and the other half was just desperate." She walked over to the wall and opened some drawers. Rummaging around, she pulled out a scrapbook. "Look at this," she said.

The redhead stared down at two black-and-whites, one a photograph and the other clipped from a newspaper. Both contained a bearded-mustached man in jeans and an army fatigue jacket who looked a lot like Leigh's husband. The detective read the copy from the LOS ANGELES HERALD.

"Police held A. Bravero for questioning in the August 10th bombing of Seaside Manufacturing. Bravero is a suspected member of Black Peace, a militant organization that claims credit for the blast that crippled that company. Bravero was released later in the day for lack of evidence. A spokesman for the LAPD said the investigation will continue."

"Your husband is A. Bravero," said Shayne.

"Was. I mean he's still my husband, but he was that other man."

"When you married him, did you know about his past?"

"No. I didn't even suspect it. When he finally told me about it a few years ago, he said it was all behind him, a product of a misspent youth." She started to shiver.

"What's wrong?"

"What happened just before I called you," she said slowly. "Tony came home for just a minute, and when he left, he was wearing the same outfit that's in those pictures."

THERE WERE MILES OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MIAMI underground and the Magic City's underworld, Shayne knew. The latter operated in the shadows because they knew they were illegal. The former because they were square pegs for reasons of race, sexual preference, or something in their past. Finding someone in the underworld was easier. Everybody knew everybody else's business, and for a price any business address could be bought. But those in the underground were loners, having little anybody else wanted and caring little about each other. The last individualists, Rourke had labeled them. Getting ferried into hell, the redhead decided, would have been preferable to doing what he knew he now had to do.

VI

FROM THE GOODYEAR BLIMP, THE ORANGE BOWL AT night seemed to a TV audience like a glistening Christmas tree ornament radiating warmth and light. But from street level, when the stadium was dark, the surrounding area looked to Shayne like the day after they drop the bomb. The window-shattered tenements rose from the unkept streets like tombstones, hideous monuments to urban renewal's gross shortcomings, and the sidewalks that had teemed with life were as deserted as a graveyard.

Shayne pulled the Buick into a narrow alleyway and threw his hubcaps into the trunk. Taking the nightstick-size flashlight from the toolchest welded beneath the seat, he began to pick his way through the evidence that civilization had once existed here.

Concrete absorbed the light's beam till it glanced off several pairs of eyes. Shayne wondered how even rats could find enough to survive in the Black Hole, Miami's refuge for those with absolutely no other place else to go.

The odor of rodent faces and decomposed garbage fought for his nose's attention. Shayne's ears picked up the slight sound of animals creeping through the litter.

When the attack came suddenly, as he had known it would, the redhead let it happen. It was the only way to get to where he had to go. He brought his arms up to shield his head from the bows and rolled into a fetal position to protect his groin.

They hit him with charred timbers, boxes, old pipe, anything they could get their hands on. The pain welled up inside the redhead, but he

forced himself not to think about it. His mind went numb to the outside world as he pictured Lucy's new bikini—a string, she had called it. White and small. Petite like the lady herself.

Thankfully the darkness overwhelmed him before the pain did.

WHEN HE CAME TO, THE BIG DETECTIVE BEGAN TO RUB his neck, then his forearms. The places that hurt the most. His belt and loafers were gone. His wallet too. Even his car keys. They would be out there now trying to find a lock that fit them. Long ago the redhead had had duplicates made, copies that didn't bear the GM logo.

But now the Buick was the least of his worries. He was in some kind of dank hole. Above him flickered a light that from the stench meant they were burning anything they could get their hands on. He didn't bother to ask himself if it were worth it. Maybe later he could answer in the affirmative.

"Man's round," slurred a voice.

"Let's have a chase," urged another.

"He's no right to come in here. Look them clothes he had on hisself. Nobody going to ground dress the way he do," said the first.

"They allus gets what's they 'serve," agreed a less than human sound.

Shayne twisted his gaze upwards. Like hairy balloons, their grotesque faces bobbed above him. Their skin was sallow from lack of sunlight, and their loose limbs swung in the eerie light as if detached from their bodies.

"I'll bet you thought freak shows were a thing of the past," said a measured voice.

Looking down into the pit, his arms akimbo, was a tall man with a black leather vest. His hand held a piece of pipe that was taller than he was. "You're in Blackjack's land now, mistuh," he said. "You give me one good reason not to pour gasoline on you and light a match."

Shayne stood up and stared back at him. "Because if I go I'm going to take a lot of you with me," he said.

"So what," answered the tall man. "What do we have to live for? Nobody wants us."

"Not true," answered Shayne. "I want you, one of you."

"Which one?" taunted a hairy face.

"The latest to arrive."

The man with the pipe leapt down. Bald and about six-six, he looked to the redhead like he had played football for the University of Mars.

"You're Blackjack," said Shayne.

"You're right." The man handed Shayne a cigarette, one that had a

while ago been his own, and lit it for him. "You got spunk coming in here like that. Anybody who can take the kind of punishment they dished out is crazy or wants something bad. I took you for a wanter right away."

"I'm looking for a man who tried to disappear early tonight."

"So you said."

"He's about five feet ten inches, wearing jeans and an army fatigue jacket."

"What makes you think I know where he is?" The tall man brandished his pipe, and overhead Shayne heard hissing.

"If you really are the famous Blackjack of Underground Miami, then you know just about everything that goes on down here."

"You're two for two, Red, but sometimes my intelligence network takes a little long. And as they say, the lines of communication are down in parts of the city, capiche."

"I was in that part of town earlier today."

"Wait a minute," said Blackjack. "You're the whitey in the big car. I was wrong about you a while ago. You are crazy."

With that the giant hugged the big detective. Shayne held his nose and let it happen.

WITHIN SECONDS HELPING HANDS WERE LIFTING THEM from the pit. As near as he could tell, Shayne figured they were in a sub-basement. Pools of water stood all around, suggesting they were a little below sea level. A fire in the middle of the room reminded Shayne of a tribal setup. The chief's band came in all sizes and all colors. Some looked diseased, others handicapped. All were dirty. Rourke had told him rumors of this group's existence, but no one had been able to verify it—until now. Still, it was reputed to be widespread.

Try as he might, the redhead couldn't bring himself to eat or drink anything they offered. That brought a moment of tension, but it passed as did some of his aches. Slowly Shayne described Tony Braverman to them. Nobody had seen him. Then the redhead recalled what his friend of the DAILY NEWS had asked him.

"You know anything about the Reverend Malachi Moses?" he said, inching closer to the fire.

A thin black woman—at least he thought it a woman—stood up. "Lordy he's got them riled up," she declared.

"Who is he?" asked Shayne.

"If you believe that garbage he be serving up in church, he be the second coming of Moses himself," she said.

"What do you mean?"

She pulled a black mass of hair from her face and said, "He say the people got to rise up, stop taking this crap whitey been handing out. He's got them thinking they all be one—not Haitians, not Cubans, not even niggers, but THE OPPRESSED."

"Amen," shouted a voice.

"Enough," said Blackjack. "We don't hold with that kind of thinking here."

A couple of the firelit figures lowered their heads.

"Ratty's right in one sense," said Blackjack. "When I was a little boy, I used to take my momma's dirty clothes to a Chinese laundry. I can still remember the old man who ran it saying to me, 'Someday all the minorities in the world are going to band together. Then the white man will be in the minority.'"

"Moses," said Shayne, "is telling the people what they want to hear."

"You got it. His religion's got them hooked like a jolt of horse. He keeps dangling a carrot in front of them telling them the Day of Revenge is just around the corner. Well, I'm not buying that crap."

"Back to my original question, who is he?"

Blackjack shifted into the direct light of the fire. Shayne could see from his features for the first time that he had a black heritage in part. "In Liberty City, folks seem to appear daily out of nowhere. I knew an old woman who claimed to be a witch. Well, she said that whitey keeps conjuring them up to eat our food, sleep in our beds, and take up our space. Half the people believe her and the other half are so wired they don't care. I'll tell you something, mistuh—I care. I got one rule down here. People shouldn't get hurt."

Shayne stretched his aching body. "You don't seem to have gotten through to them."

"Outsiders like you who come in here looking for trouble don't count. Now me and my friends are going to go about our business. Why don't you do the same?"

"Suppose you do pick up something about the man I'm looking for," persisted the redhead, "how can I get in touch with you?"

Blackjack stuck the end of his pipe in the big detective's face. "You let me handle that, Mr. Michael Shayne, Private Investigator."

Shayne got up and walked away from the fire unsure of whether he wanted to be contacted.

VII

THE REDHEAD HAD FOUND THE BUICK BEFORE BLACK-jack's horde. He reached under the right front wheelwell and retrieved

the magnetized key case. He was glad too he had emptied his wallet of all its unreplaceables.

The Braverman case, he reflected as the car sped through Miami's night, was like an earthquake sending out tremors from its shadowy epicenter. An old friend he hadn't even heard from in years. A husband with a buried past that had been unearthed. A corporation trying to cover its past whose image spoke softly, but whose personnel carried a big stick. And all this was happening against a city that was about as stable as nitroglycerin. Then there was the mysterious Malachi Moses who was shaking the nitro.

Was there a common thread running through the whole situation? Was it more than coincidence that everybody was trying to dredge up or drown the past?

Shayne pulled the Buick into the garage of his hotel-apartment and took the elevator to his floor. He needed time to clear his head, and that was something that a short, cold Martell and a long, hot shower could do best.

The R&R would have to wait he found. As the elevator belched him out, he spotted two three-piece suits outside his door. The easiest thing was to take the elevator back down, but he had been passive too long.

You could only be a target in a shooting gallery for a while. Now was the time to become the rifle.

"Well, if it ain't Huckleberry Finn," said one of the three-piece suits, looking at Shayne's torn pants and soiled shirt. "Looks like he just pulled himself out of the river," said his companion.

"It smells more like a sewer," chimed in the first.

The redhead could have pointed out that his hotel was not a great place to audition their Las Vegas lounge act, but instead he grabbed the first would-be comedian by his tie and slung him into the wall.

"Hey, pal," said the Irish detective, "it's customary for visitors to wait downstairs."

Out of the corner of his eye, Shayne saw the other suit advance. Quickly, in the manner of a hammer-thrower, he swung the first man into his companion, sending both reeling to the worn carpet. "Next time," growled the redhead, "make an appointment."

The detective had started for the door with his duplicate key when he saw the smaller comedian reach beneath his coat.

That was it. Nobody drew down on Mike Shayne.

Tensing his toes back as Greg Chen had taught him, he delivered a vicious front kick. The ball of his right foot crashed into the crouching figure's sternum. Either his sharp scream or the bone's crack was loud enough to wake the neighbors.

The narrow hallway worked to Shayne's advantage. The second man had to approach him from the front, and that seemed for him an unfamiliar position.

"Hey look, Buddy," said the redhead's antagonist as he drew a monstrous .357, "we just came to tell you to stay away from Tony Braverman."

The big detective used a fast leg block. His right foot swung around into the magnum, and it crashed into the cracked plaster wall. Shayne stepped in and snapped his left elbow up beneath the man's prominent chin. He followed the blow with a right punch to the mouth. Seeing the blood spurt from between split lips, the detective wondered if he could collect a finder's fee from a local dentist.

The other man climbed to his knees. It had been a frustrating day for the big redhead, and he had taken enough of a beating earlier that night. Almost detached, he watched his clenched fists batter the half-risen figure into a bloody pulp.

At that moment his violence didn't bother him. Hell, hadn't they come after him? Hadn't they pulled guns? If it took brute animalism to survive, then so be it.

He punched the elevator. When it arrived, he pitched them in like two sides of beef. As he pushed the button for the lobby, he spat out, "You tell whoever sent you that your warmup act just bombed in Chez Shayne. If the headliner wants something, next time he'd better come himself."

He called McGee, the new nightclerk from Fort Lauderdale, to tell him to be sure the trash was put out. When the bathroom was full of steam, the redhead threw down a shot of brandy and stepped in the shower.

As the dirt and stress ran down the drain, Shayne found himself drifting off. Maybe, he thought, if he could take more moments like this to check out of the real world, the blood-lust he had displayed in the hallway could never take full control. Times like this reminded him that though he lived in a violent world, he was still apart from it.

He draped a Turkish towel across his slowly recovering body and headed for the liquor cabinet. Halfway across his living room he stopped short.

Resting across his favorite chair was an eight-foot length of pipe with a note hanging from it.

Somewhat shaken that someone had somehow gotten in his locked apartment without his knowing it, Shayne read the message: Gambol's Warehouse. Dawn.

UNABLE TO SLEEP, THE REDHEAD ARRIVED EARLY. FIRST light was still an hour away as he carefully picked the warehouse's rear door.

A few lights dangled in the cavernous room, making every shadow seem ominous. Shayne had no idea what Blackjack's message meant, what to expect. Would Braverman be there? Alive? If so, what was his purpose? Why would Blackjack set up such a meet? What did the underground leader have to gain by playing middle man?

There was only one way to find out.

The big detective gripped the .38 tightly as he leaned against some packing crates and waited.

He hadn't meant to nod off, but when he heard the click, his eyes shot open wide.

He was staring into the familiar muzzle of Tony Braverman's .45.

VIII

"DROP THE GUN, SHAYNE," SAID TONY BRAVERMAN. "I don't want to shoot you, but I will."

Hesitating, the big detective stared at the automatic as well as the man in the fatigue jacket and patched jeans holding it. With two days' growth, Leigh's husband was already beginning to resemble the man in the pictures she had shown him.

"Please put your gun away," said Braverman. "I just want to talk."

Shayne, sensing the nervousness in the voice, jammed the .38 into its resting place in the small of his back. "Why did you agree to meet me here?" he said.

The MICO dropout stuck his gun in the side pocket of his jacket and sat down crosslegged in front of the detective. "Even before I married Leigh, I knew about you. Your name was always slipping into our conversations. When I started having my . . . my troubles, she even suggested I see you."

Shayne tapped the pack of Camels and offered one to Braverman. Instead, the sitting figure pulled out a hand-rolled cigarette. Its smell immediately told the redhead it hadn't been made from Kentucky burley.

"Troubles?" said Shayne.

"All my life I've been a misfit. When the other kids were playing Little League, I was fiddling with my chemistry set. Instead of a college fraternity, I joined the Young Democrats. The whole shmeare—late-night strategy sessions, voter registration in Mississippi. Finally I thought I had found what I wanted out of life when I worked the California Primary for a great man, Bobby Kennedy."

The detective kept quiet, realizing that Braverman was lost in the memory and the marijuana.

"That night in the hotel," continued the sitting figure, "when Sirhan pulled the trigger, he killed more than one man. I had believed in peace, in the scientific approach, but that bullet put a hole in my logic. I started working on the principle that real progress, real power came through action, and the more violent the action, the greater the progress. I got involved with a West Coast underground group, Black Peace." He patted the insignia on his field jacket. "With my knowledge of chemistry, they put me in munitions, explosives. We took down more buildings than the Weathermen," he said with pride in his voice.

Shayne exhaled slowly and said, "How did a radical like that ever get involved with the establishment, a company like MICO?"

Braverman let out a high-pitched, sustained laugh that seemed to rise above his sweet-scented smoke. "That's a real kicker, isn't it? It didn't take me long to figure out that Black Peace's strategy for a New America was nothing more than blowing up everything in sight. All they were interested in was becoming 'the people's heroes'."

Shayne had run up against enough radical organizations to understand Braverman's insight. Most such groups were on big-league ego trips.

"Camus," said the bearding figure, "claimed the greatest danger to the rebel was making the new cause into something just as domineering as the overthrown one. So I decided to try something else you heard a lot about in those days, working within the system. Since I had taken my B.S. in chemistry, I got a job in a small plastics firm. I had just as much aptitude there as I had for bombs. So I rose up the ranks to management. Then MICO absorbed us, and I was moved to Miami."

"Where it looks like you've flipflopped again."

"A few years ago I was promoted to vice-president in the research department. Even though they took away my lab coat and gave me a blue three-piece suit, I still had time for an occasional pet project. Six months ago they moved me out of there completely and over to Building 12. We scientists are a curious lot, so I wondered what was going on back in the lab. Every time I tried to find out, though, they sent Leigh and me on some promotional junket for our latest bug spray."

"You didn't care much for the executive washroom?" said Shayne.

"Yes and no. What bothered me was the feeling that the top floor was trying to keep something from me. They changed the locks at the lab, and my computer terminal was denied access to Current Projects.

Through Personnel, I fond that MICO was letting go all of the people I'd worked closely with." He held the smoke in his lungs for a long time, then said, "I guess I let it all get to me. I started missing work, avoiding the one person I'd been able to count on, Leigh. Then, three days ago I got a call from a new guy in the lab, McKinnon. He said something strange was going on down there that he couldn't talk to me about over the phone, a Project Smother. So I set up a meeting for that night at a local Holiday Inn."

"What happened?"

"Nothing. McKinnon never showed. So I started to get real worried. I tapped the computer where I could. I talked to people. Nobody knew a thing. Project Smother might just be a piece of fiction."

"Why are you telling me all this?" asked Shayne, recalling something Tim Rourke always said—everybody out there has got a story; all they need is somebody to tell it to. Well, as a detective, the redhead decided, he had heard more confessions than most priests, but he wasn't in the atonement business. All he had to offer them was a passion for justice.

"Because from all Leigh has said about you and I've read in the papers, you're what Diogenes was looking for with his lantern—an honest man." Suddenly he pulled the .45 from his pocket and leveled it on the redhead. "I can't prove a thing about MICO—yet, but I've got bad vibes about that place. You see, for once in my life I'm gonna do something worthwhile."

"Is that why the gun, pal?"

"I don't want you or anybody stopping me, no matter how noble the motive." He stood up and ground out his cigarette. If I read you right, though, Shayne, and if I don't finish the job, you're the guy who'll 1) see it through and 2) take care of Leigh. Now don't move till I'm gone."

Slowly Braverman, his eyes and gun riveted on the big detective, backed out the door.

Shayne remained motionless though he knew he could have drawn down on the reborn radical. The guy had pegged him perfectly. A gut feeling told the redhead that Project Smother did exist, and whatever it was, it was probably a lot more lethal than Braverman's .45.

IX

HAVING LONG SINCE REALIZED THAT HIS VACATION WAS over, Shayne went directly to the DAILY NEWS. He had called Rourke's apartment, but no one answered. Maybe the night owl had become an early bird.

When the redhead walked into the City Room at 7:00 A.M. and saw the office over half filled, he knew something big was up. A copy boy was circulating through the desks pouring coffee into stained mugs, and several TV monitors had been strategically positioned among the reporters' desks.

The red-eyed reporter never looked up when Shayne slid a chair up beside him.

"What's up, Tim?"

"The Day of Revenge," answered Rourke, his eyes fastened on the television nearest him.

The big detective recalled Blackjack using the same expression. "Is the Reverend Moses about to keep his promise to the people?"

"Sure as hell looks like it," said the reporter. "A.M. MIAMI's been doing some remotes from around the inner city. Moses is calling all the minorities together for a morning rally in Liberty City, then a march. And, believe me, from the looks on their faces, they're not going to be carrying peace signs."

"Where are they marching to?" said Shayne, sticking an empty styrofoam cup in front of the harried copy boy.

Rourke swiveled his chair to face Shayne. "I'm actually glad you dropped in, shamus. That's the funny thing. Yesterday you came by asking questions about MICO, and just a few minutes ago the Reverend announced that CLAIM has targeted the very same complex for their march."

"What's this CLAIM? It sounds vaguely familiar."

"The latest acronym. The Citizen's League Against Injustice to Minorities."

"Has a nice ring to it," said the detective.

"I hope you're not joking. Moses is on the verge of bringing this beautiful city to its knees. You know, Miami's over three-fourths non-white. Can you imagine what would have happened if Martin Luther King's march on Washington had not been peaceful?"

"Why MICO?"

"Supposedly it's symbolic. Moses claims that their hiring record has been more discriminatory toward minorities than that of anybody in the area."

"You said 'supposedly'."

"That's right. I can't understand it. After you piqued my curiosity yesterday, I tried to do a little research on your favorite company. As best I can find, their record is almost exemplary. Look at that!"

Shayne glanced up at the monitor. The live camera showed the gathering of an already ugly mob. "They look more ready for a

lynching than a symbolic gesture."

Rourke said, "That's what Will Gentry's afraid of. The National Guard is already standing by to help his SWAT units. Moses claims his group is planning to march to MICO and force the company to hire minority workers on the spot."

"Can't anything be done to head them off? Hasn't there been any negotiating?"

"The mayor had a multi-racial team with the good Reverend all night. Finally, about two hours ago Moses got up and walked out, determined to march." Suddenly Rourke crumpled his cup and threw it on the floor. "And now we've got that guy representing law and order."

Again Shayne looked at the monitor.

A man in an Army uniform was telling a reporter, "And as sure as my name is Colonel Alexander Byrd, my National Guard boys are ready. I've promised the mayor and the governor that nobody will enter a private enterprise complex illegally. If that Moses and his people try, then they must be willing to suffer the consequences."

The military figure's booming voice was unfamiliar, but Shayne recognized his face. It was the tall, gray-haired man the redhead had seen escorted into Building 12 the day before as he was being ushered out.

THE RED PICKUP STOPPED AT THE MAIN GATE OF MICO. A tense guard walked out of his house and spoke through the window. "What's your business, buddy?"

The driver motioned to the truck's bed. "Computer parts. They're for some guy named Braverman."

The guard dialed his phone, said a few words, and then replaced the receiver. "Mr. Braverman's not in yet."

The driver held out a clipboard. "Then why don't you help me out and sign this invoice?"

"I'm not authorized, and besides I got more important things to do than babysit a bunch of circuit boards."

"Hey, pal, it's O.K. with me. I'll turn this buggy around and take this stuff back downtown. I'm getting paid by the hour. All I know is my boss told me the computer was down and Braverman wanted these parts ASAP."

The guard hesitated, scratched his head, then said, "I don't know."

"Is it or isn't it?" said the driver, revving his engine.

The guard handed a pass and a map through the window. "Get that stuff over to Building 12 and then get out of here, fast."

Shayne pulled the pickup into a parking place outside the concrete building. He had known that with the situation the way it was, getting inside the complex today was going to be much tougher than the previous day. He wasn't sure where to go from here, but he could lay that by ear. He glanced at his watch. Nearly 10:30. It had taken him longer to get hold of the Computer City truck and have the phony invoice typed than he had thought.

Just as he opened the cab door, he spotted another familiar figure. Striding toward Building 12, a grocery bag and a thermos in hand, was one of the comedians who had bombed at *Chez Shayne* the night before.

The rawboned redhead went with his instincts. Snatching a cardboard box from the bed of the truck, he followed the three-piece suit all the way inside. Shayne watched him enter the middle elevator and noted how the needle stopped on 4. Then the redhead pressed the button.

"Sir," called out the receptionist across the lobby, "can I help you?"

"It's O.K.," he said to the young woman in a blue blazer and white skirt. "I know my way to Mr. Long's office."

Shayne stepped off the elevator into an empty corridor. There was no life visible, and all the doors were shut. He didn't have time to check each room on the long hallway. He turned as he heard a click to his left.

Coming out of a room down the hall was the suit, his hands empty. Hurriedly Shayne lifted the box in front of his face and walked toward the MICO strongarm.

"Hey, buddy," called the suit, "what are you doing up here?"

"Playing catch," the detective said, and tossed the box toward the man.

The hulk caught the box instinctively and a right cross unexpectedly. He dropped like the curtain on a bad play.

Shayne opened the just-closed door. Sitting with one hand cuffed to a table was a small man in a lab coat and a couple of days growth.

"Dr. McKinnon, I presume," said Shayne.

X

"WHO ARE YOU?" SAID THE SCIENTIST.

Shayne, dragging the unconscious suit into the room, said, "A friend of Tony Braverman." He took a set of keys out of the comedian's pocket. Freeing McKinnon, he cuffed the strongarm.

"I was on my way to speak to him the other night," explained the small man, "when Jennings there and some of his buddies snatched me

right out of the Holiday Inn's parking lot. Braverman's the only guy at MICO I thought I could trust."

"About what?"

The scientist hesitated. "How do I know I can trust you?"

"Tony told me you wanted to tell him something about a Project Smother."

The small man rubbed his wrists.

"Make up your mind, damn it," snapped Shayne. "The lid's going to blow off this city in less than an hour, and you may be in a position to stop it."

"Me?"

"What is this Project Smother and why did MICO muzzle one of its employees to prevent anyone from learning about it?" persisted the redhead.

McKinnon jerked open the door. "Follow me. There's something I need to show you."

THE SCIENTIST UNLOCKED ANOTHER DOOR. TO GET THIS far into the Research and Development Laboratories, they had already gone through five locked doors.

McKinnon flipped on the light. They were standing in a small lab filled with computers, cages of white mice, test tubes, and other machinery the redhead didn't understand. The scientist led Shayne over to a thick, plate-glass window and pointed at it.

The redhead looked in. Cages of rats were stacked. Some of the rodents looked normal, but others were grossly deformed. Oversized heads, missing limbs, tumors, and hairless bodies stood out.

"What the . . .?" said Shayne.

"Project Smother."

"An animal freak show?"

"Unfortunately," admitted McKinnon. "We started out with the right goal in mind. Law enforcement officials have long known that MACE and tear gas are not effective enough in crowd control. MICO got a Defense Department grant to develop a better alternative. In some ways we did. GASP seemed the perfect answer at first. Fit into anything like a tear gas gun. Came in canisters or sprays. Effective instantly. Attacked the central nervous system. Rendered the victim absolutely helpless in seconds and lasted for about an hour."

"Nerve gas."

"A highly sophisticated version."

"What's the problem then?"

"MICO was in a race."

"Profits were down."

"We in R&D were given a ten-month ultimatum, but you can't plot science on a profit-and-loss spread sheet. You must develop *and* test."

Shayne pointed at the listless mutations in their cages. "Wait a minute. You're saying that GASP did that."

"I was in charge of what little post-developmental testing we did. GASP works all right, but I found that in 20% of the cases there was an unpredictable genetic change."

"What do you think the gas would do to people?"

"Maybe nothing. But on the other hand, do you remember what the Russians' 'yellow rain' did to the Afghans? Until I knew for sure, I didn't want to certify the stuff safe."

"But MICO did."

"Yes. They knew that any genetic mutation wouldn't show up for at least a generation."

"The son of Agent Orange."

"They put pressure on me to falsify my results. When I wouldn't, I started getting threatening phone calls, hints of termination. That sort of thing."

"That's why you turned to Braverman."

"Scuttlebutt around here has it he marches to the beat of a different drum, that he has something MICO's short on—integrity. You know the rest of the story."

Shayne couldn't take his eyes off the hideous forms crawling behind the pane. Something even more grotesque was taking shape in the detective's mind. Sure, it all fit. A minority leader without a past organizing a march against a company with an exemplary non-discriminatory record, a suspicious V.P. kicked upstairs to get him out of the lab, a National Guard colonel determined to protect private enterprise—the same private enterprise that gave him the V.I.P. treatment a day earlier. Profit over people. That was the ultimate evil.

Suddenly the door into the laboratory burst open. Standing there, his hands shaking and his eyes wild like someone on drugs, was Tony Braverman.

He held up something that looked to Shayne like a TV remote control device. Braverman's thumb trembled over a solitary red button.

"You've got five minutes to get out," quivered Braverman. "Then I'm going to send this place where it belongs—to hell."

XI

A YOUNG BLACK MAN BEAT AGAINST THE GUARDHOUSE'S bulletproof window with a baseball bat. With every blow the ever-

swelling crowd shouted encouragement.

On the other side of the barbed-wire-topped fence, both the black-clad SWAT units and the olive-drabbed National Guardsmen stood nervously in formation, weapons ready.

Overhead the October sun marched upward, causing everyone to sweat a little more. Chief of Police Will Gentry threw his stubby cigar down in disgust.

"Damn it, Byrd," snorted the cop. "We're here to protect this complex, not attack that crowd."

"Don't lecture me on military tactics," answered the National Guard commander. "The best way to alleviate the negative situation is to disperse the mob."

"Chief," interrupted a suited member of the mayor's task force, "there's a civilian over there who says he must talk to you now."

"Christ, Creighton, I don't have time for reporters."

"Sir, he said to tell you 'the only person who's going to pull your bacon out of the fire is Mike Shayne'."

"Damn it, man," growled Gentry. "Get him over here." He turned to the colonel. "You give me five minutes before you do anything or I'll rip those birds off your shoulder and make you eat them."

The redhead pushed toward the police chief with a group that looked unfamiliar to Gentry. One was handcuffed, one was wearing a lab coat, and the other appeared just sprung from a drug abuse center.

"Get me a bullhorn," demanded Shayne. "Then you and the colonel come with me. I don't have time to explain."

"Where are we going?"

"Into the mouth of the lion. Trust me."

Gentry, grabbing a bullhorn, followed Shayne and his motley crew over to Colonel Byrd, who was talking to a young officer. "Captain, give the order to load those cannister shells we just issued and wait for my command to fire."

"Hold it, captain!" said Gentry.

"Stay out of this, Gentry," Byrd warned. "What are these civilians doing here?"

"That's right, Will," said Shayne. "Leave the colonel alone so he can carry out everything according to plan. He's got his orders."

"I know," growled Gentry. "Straight from the governor."

"No," said Shayne. "From MICO. Tell me, Colonel Byrd, what were you doing here yesterday?"

"Reconnoitering the territory, of course, to set up my defense perimeter," shot back the commander.

"One small problem," said the detective. "Moses didn't announce

his target until this morning. There's only one way you could have known it beforehand."

Byrd stammered.

Shayne grabbed his arm. "And when we walk out to those demonstrators, we won't find the good reverend at the front, in the line of fire."

"This man's crazy," said Byrd, refusing to budge.

"I'm not," said Shayne pointing at the still-shaking Tony Braverman who had agreed to a change in his original plan, "but he is. And he has this entire complex wired to blow at the slightest pressure to that red button in his hand."

"We'd better go with him, colonel," urged Genry.

Reluctantly Byrd followed Shayne and the others toward the gate.

Gentry took the bullhorn and shouted above the teeming masses. "Listen, listen to this man. If you don't believe what he has to say, I guarantee you that in five minutes I'll open the gate and escort you in to the president of MICO myself."

Out of the hesitant, quieting crowd burst the young black with the bat. Just as he swung it toward the gate, a long metal pipe intercepted the blow.

Emerging from the crowd was the tall figure of Blackjack. "Listen to the man," he said.

Shayne didn't need the bullhorn to shout, "Where are you, Reverend Moses? I thought a leader was supposed to stand out from the crowd, not hide behind it."

Faces glanced around, and slowly the sea of humanity parted. The Reverend Malachi Moses strode forward. His white suit contrasted with the soiled clothing of his marchers. His close-cropped goatee and mustache beneath his razor-cut reminded Shayne of a well-heeled Satan rather than a sack-clothed Moses.

"We, the oppressed, demand justice," said the Reverend. "The Day of Revenge is upon us."

"So is the Day of Deceit," said Shayne. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small, copper-colored spray can that McKinnon had given him. The detective addressed the crowd. "The National Guard is waiting across that fence for you with a new weapon made for them by MICO. They claim this new spray is for crowd control, a paralyzing gas with no lasting effects. Your shepherd here has in the manner of all great leaders volunteered to take the first shot of GASP. He wants to show you that you are not being used as guinea pigs, that he's not leading you like lambs to the slaughter."

Shayne pointed the can at Moses' sweat-drenched face.

"No," screamed the Reverend. "No."

He had only taken three steps before he was clotheslined by a lead pipe.

TIM ROURKE TURNED OFF THE TAPE RECORDER THAT HE
had earlier set on the Beef House's walnut bar. "That's a hell of a
story, Mike. And to think that final confrontation at the gate was
nothing but a bluff on your part."

"Call it a calculated risk," said Shayne from the adjacent bar stool.
He motioned for Pat to bring them another round of beer. "I had to
take a chance to stop what could have been a very ugly scene. Sure the
spray can was empty."

"What about that supposed remote control device?"

"I'm just glad no one pushed the button. It could have destroyed all
evidence of the conspiracy."

"Even Will was surprised to learn that a panicked board of directors
could have orchestrated the whole confrontation just so a power-
hungry National Guard commander could test a crowd control gas on a
group of human guinea pigs."

"And the sudden appearance of Moses in the inner city was no
miracle," said Shayne. "He was an out-of-town MICO employee who
had been groomed for the position and bankrolled."

Rourke emptied his tall glass. "What about your friends, the
Bravermans?"

Shayne stared wistfully into the mirror. "I saw them briefly before
they left Miami. They're going to try to start a new life somewhere out
West, and I for one am betting they make it."

"I knew I'd find you two here," came a female voice from the
doorway.

They turned to see a well-tanned Lucy Hamilton. "Michael
Shayne," said his secretary, "I figured all you'd do the whole time I
was gone was sit here drinking beer and telling lies. Now, tell me—am I
right?"

Shayne didn't bother to answer.

NEXT MONTH

Mike Shayne returns in another thrilling adventure!

Don't miss it!

Making himself a target was not Heathcoate's idea of good journalism but it seemed the only way of flushing out any conspiracy in the recent deaths. It would make one hell of a story—if he survived!

A Greek's Way

by JERRY JACOBSON

AS NEARLY AS ANYONE COULD ESTABLISH, JEREMY Stangle habitually stopped for the happy-hour at the Boojum Tree Lounge in the city's financial district, talked business and sports with acquaintances and associates between vodka martinis and then departed the lounge for the seven-story Diamond Parking Garage two blocks away.

His tiny red Fiat was parked on an upper level, also out of long habit. As he took it down through the curves of the garage's ramps, a large, expensive sedan fell in behind Stangle's Fiat, seemingly just another weary businessman moving out for the long drive home to the suburbs.

At a ramp turn on the fourth level, the engine of the big sedan gunned suddenly, picked up speed and leapt forward as though it were a deadly missile propelled from a high-powered launcher.

It impacted with the little Fiat before it could swing into the turn. For thirty feet the two cars moved as one. And then the garage wall loomed and the Fiat became crushed in its arms. So forceful had been the collision, the police would say later that only a grille insignia allowed them to immediately identify the sports car's make.

It took rescuers a half-hour to torch and cut Jeremy Stangle from the wreckage. The femurs of both his legs had been shattered into countless pieces. His kidneys and spleen had ruptured and his spinal cord had been severed. As many pints of Type B-negative blood as possible were readied at the hospital for Stangle's arrival and blood banks all around the city were contacted for emergency runs.

Hospital life-support systems kept Jeremy Stangle alive for three days. An intensive care unit nurse later related that his eyelids fluttered once, but that was all. On the fourth day, hospital surgeons and physicians agreed the vigil was senseless and futile and the support systems were withdrawn. Jeremy Stangle was pronounced dead at 9:38 a.m.

HEATHCOATE DID TWO PIECES ON JEREMY STANGLE. THE first had been a handout from his city editor, just a terse request that he "pop on down to the Diamond Parking Garage and see about an accident involving a local banker." The second had come after his brief vigil at the hospital, merely a follow-up piece no longer than the width of four fingers noting that the banker had died from his injuries, that he had been an investment counselor for a respected midtown firm, and that he was survived by a wife, a son and a daughter.

It was there that Heathcoate's professional responsibility ended. He was not the *Sun-Herald's* obituary reporter. That was statistical work and was arbitrarily dumped on a first-year reporter as a harsh introduction to what would be a career of tedium and poverty. The current obits editor was a statuesque female, without much nonsense to her, named Swannie Brookings, who had once pied her college's homecoming queen at an annual president's tea dance. The confection had been chocolate cream, she'd told Heathcoate, the ultimate-best kind for pieing, because of its triple-threat capacities for plopping, sticking and staining.

Besides compiling daily statistical lists of the born, the dead, the married, the separated and the divorced, Swannie Brookings was also responsible for what was termed advance-obits, fairly comprehensive biographies on the city's rich, famous and powerful. The information was stored not only in the memory of Ms. Brookings' own city room processor—which she'd argued for especially, because it had the capability to store nearly everything but a kitchen sink—but also in Charlie, a full-blown computer housed in the newspaper's Morgue-Library. She was proud of the fact that she could display almost instantly, the high- and low-points of ten thousands of the town's notables, go-getters and scoundrels.

What she had to tell Heathcoate about Jeremy Stangle's past as an Oklahoma banker started Heathcoate wondering whether Stangle's death had been merely an accident in a parking garage.

"It seems Stangle was the chief loan officer in the Energy Department of a northern Oklahoma savings and loan bank," she told him. "That was four or five years ago, when the oil and gas drillers had the tacit approval of the FDIC and the federal government to shift their wildcat explorations into high-gear in order to get the country out from under OPEC's thumb."

"Energy loans?" said Heathcoate.

"He made handshake deals with dozens of gas and oil drilling companies, real high-fliers. Then, he added a few new wrinkles of his own. He began to funnel the loans to other, larger banks, mostly in Chicago and Detroit. They're called Participation Loans. The exploration loans are purchased by bigger banks for a fee, allowing Stangle to get the original loans off his books. In return, he gets the original loan money back, plus the fee and the upstream bank assumes the loan debt and the high interest payments.

"Stangle's bank got rich on fees for finding borrowers by shipping out the loans as fast as it made them. Everything went well at the beginning. The wildcatters were bringing in their fields and repaying their loans and Stangle was banking his fees, without having to offer collateral or personal guarantees from the drillers."

"And then things began to fly into the fan," said Heathcoate.

"The economy began to soften," said Swannie Brookings. "World petroleum inventories began to bloat, demand started to fall off, and crude oil prices dropped through the floor."

"Which meant energy stock and oil issues hit bottom, too," anticipated Heathcoate, "along with the profits of the gas and oil drilling companies."

"And all those big banks found themselves stuck with those bad loans. They collapsed almost overnight. Energy lending officers were being fired right and left, the House Banking Committee began federal hearings and Jeremy Stangle was fired by his own bank for all the unauthorized razzle-dazzle with the loans. He hadn't done anything criminal. He hadn't stolen any bank monies or loan fees, or anything like that; but his own personal bank accounts grew healthier than they should have on just his salary."

"The bigger banks were kicking back some fee money to Stangle in order to secure those loans with the high interest profits."

Brookings nodded, as a sly smile slid up the corners of her mouth. "He was in bed with them, Heathcliffe, my little pigeon. They took a

bath when the loans went bad and he took a powder and eventually ended up here on the coast."

"And so you're saying we have a bit more here than a ramp-collision in a parking garage."

"Heathcliffe," she cooed, innocently twisting a strand of blonde hair around an index finger, "I'm just a rookie statistics editor with paste pots to clean and a coffee-run to make for all the Pulitzer biggies in this room. What the hell do I know?"

THE DETECTIVE FROM THE HOMICIDE SQUAD WHO NOW held the case file on the death of Jeremy Stangle was an ancient, shambling Greek named Kritsonis, who let his eyebrows run amok, had no lofty ambitions beyond catching criminals and still ate his wife's brown-bag lunches in People's Park a block above the Public Safety Building with secretaries and data processors and department store clerks.

That's where Heathcoate found him, sitting alone on a patch of grass with his legs crossed and one fist around a slab of pita pocket bread crammed full of salami, fresh vegetables and olive oil.

"Heathcliffe. Fine day, isn't it? Have a cherry tomato. There's plenty of them."

"Already ate, sergeant, thanks." Kritsonis already had his brown paper sack neatly folded beside him. Every other week or so, Heathcoate would catch a glimpse of the detective in the Public Safety Building, or on his way to his car, a brick of paper bags under his arm, all perfectly secured with wide rubber bands. Bringing them back home to his wife had likely been one of his original marriage vows.

"So, what's intrigued you *this* week, Heathcliffe?"

"The decadent who was crushed in his Fiat in the Diamond Parking Garage a couple days back," said Heathcoate.

"Ah, the banker," said Kritsonis, the dark, Greek eyes flashing with significance the way they always did whenever someone prominent or notable became caught in the machinations of police business. "Belonged to all the right clubs, went to all the right restaurants, had all the right connections. Only to end up in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"Did you know he was from Oklahoma?"

"Oil and natural gas fiasco. Loan transfers and bank failures. Yes, Heathcliffe, we know."

"Lotsa folks lost their shirts back there in Oklahoma," Heathcoate commented.

"Retribution, yes, I caught your drift, Heathcliffe. The sedan that

turned Stangle and his Fiat into a concrete sandwich was stolen from the parking garage. Its door lock had been jimmied and its ignition had been wired. Its driver fled the scene. No one saw him. Poof, into thin air."

"Not much to go on."

"*Nothing to go on,*" corrected the Greek detective. "But I'm often accused of being a spoilsport when I'm told to jam case folders into the back of the file for lack of evidence or leads. Lots of very fancy dancers down in that prosecutor's office, Heathcliffe. They like the flashy numbers, the quick arrests and convictions. But I am incurably obstinate and arrogant, Heathcliffe, and so I don't pay much attention to all the fancy dancers downtown. In the end, we all do the same dance, making the fancy dancing no big deal."

"Where is the sedan?"

"The impound garage. You shining to this case, Heathcliffe? Ah, yes, the eternal Pulitzer chase."

"You wouldn't mind if I looked at it?"

"It's a free world, Heathcliffe. And as a Western journalist, you have the right to freely inquire. I'll tell Amos to be on the lookout for you."

HEATHCOATE'S THIRTY MINUTES SPENT IN THE IMPOUND
Garage in and under the sedan brought a minor surprise, one he sensed Kritsonis didn't know about.

And he was right.

"The accelerator was jammed? Heathcliffe, you amaze me."

"And not tampered with," said Heathcoate. "Which infers you may have only a car thief whose luck turned bad and not a hired killer."

"Very intriguing notion," admitted Kritsonis. "A random thief finds a likely, expensive sedan, breaks into it, does some wiring and thinks he has clear sailing down to the street and off to some chop shop. Only to find himself stuck in traffic behind a sportscar."

"He presses down on the gas pedal," Heathcoate finished, "and before he can get the shift out of gear, he becomes a participant in a fatal accident."

"Ergo, no retribution from Oklahoma and no hired killer," said Kritsonis. "And that was my favorite theory, too, Heathcliffe, I want you to know that."

"Well," said Heathcoate quietly, commiserating with the detective at how quickly their deadend had been reached, "for what little it's worth, it was my favorite theory, too."

"HEATHCLIFFE, YOU GOT A SEC?"

Swannie Brookings had been in the newspaper's Morgue-Library nearly the entire morning and she was now standing over Heathcoate's desk rubbing the blurs and cobwebs from her eyes. There was little doubt she'd been seated in front of Charlie's console screen to learn what the computer could display for her in the way of combinations and permutations.

Heathcoate pushed back from his processor and reached for a cigarette from the pack on his desk. "Sure, Swannie. What have you got?"

"Maybe something, maybe just a migraine," the girl told him. "My mind seemed to want to toy around with the death of this Stangle guy in the Diamond Parking Garage, so I've been dancing with Charlie all morning to see what he could come up with."

"And?"

"And what we appear to have here is the apparent accidental deaths of three other local semi-biggies within the past ninety days."

Heathcoate nudged his glasses up to his forehead. He almost never wore them in the office, because every other *Sun-Herald* reporter with faulty eyes wore contacts and he came in for some considerable kidding about it. When they weren't calling him Clark Kent, it was Heathcliffe, the name of one of Red Skelton's pigeons. He couldn't clearly remember the last time anyone had ever addressed him by his rightful name, with the vital exception of the payroll department. All he needed now to give them a real field-day was to fall head-over-heels in love with and marry a girl named Gertrude, or Lois.

"Who are the other semi-biggies?" he asked Swannie Brookings.

"The first was a real-estate developer named Charles Seymour. They charged him with thirty counts of securities fraud. He sold home and recreational sites. You must have heard of them. Seymour purchased ads for them in the *Sun-Herald* that were a mile wide. Spinnaker Bay, Sunpointe Village, places with jazzy names like that. These were supposed to be investment sales on a limited partnership basis. Only Seymour used the funds to re-invest in other deals, without the consent of the thirty investors. Comingling they call it."

"Was he arrested?"

"No, only charged," said Brookings. "He dropped out of sight, the way they all do when they smell indictment in the wind."

"How did Seymour die?"

"In a liquor store robbery over on Yesler Street."

"He robbed a liquor store?"

"No-no," said Swannie Brookings, with a little laugh. "He was a

customer. He was buying a fifth of gin and some vermouth when the robbers burst into the store. The owner jerked out a pistol from beneath a counter . . . ”

“. . . and Seymour got it between the white wines and the liqueurs,” Heathcoate anticipated.

“Caught in the proverbial crossfire.”

“And the robbers?”

“The two of them got away clean before the cops arrived,” said Brookings.

“They determine whose gun put Seymour in the cold, cold ground?”

“One of the robbers. The owner of the liquor store couldn’t shoot worth a damn. He hit the ceiling three times and killed a display of French brandy collector decanters.”

“Who was the second?” Heathcoate asked.

“Former county assessor of about a decade ago, Otto Zielinski.”

“That’s a weasel we all remember. He over-assessed home owners and under-assessed the big developers of those downtown condos and high-rise office complexes.”

“Of the former, he claimed he was only assessing at anticipated market value in a strong economic period. Of the latter, he claimed computational error. He cost the average taxpayer millions and he probably put developer kickbacks into his pocket, but that was never proven. He lost the next county election by the largest margin in the state’s history and rode quietly off into the sunset.”

“And how did Zielinski die?” Heathcoate asked.

“His ultra-light single-engine airplane got a gust of wind, rolled over like a dead dog and did a deadfall into a tree on a private golf course. Ironically, he was a club member.”

“Any evidence the plane had been tampered with?”

“None that the FAA could determine. But those ultra-lights are put together with a staple gun. Add one more staple and you’ve upset a very delicate balance.”

“And the third victim? The one before Stangle?”

“Arthur VanRoyer. You probably read about him. Our biggest financial scoundrel. Former director of People’s Guaranty Savings and Loan, a brilliant mortgage banker, they called him. Also a brilliant embezzler. Took the company for over a quarter-million in cash and cashier’s checks. When the auditors finished and pushed themselves back from the books, that figure was readjusted to a half-million. Before he dropped from sight, it was rumored he made brief stops in Nassau, the Bahamas and Switzerland and they weren’t for cheeseburgers-to-go.”

"Numbered, anonymous bank deposits."

"When he surfaced, U.S. federal agents were sent to South America to make a positive identification. He'd changed his name and had submitted himself to some quite extensive plastic surgery. But fingerprints and dental records were enough to confirm it was VanRoyer."

"And all that embezzled cash?" said Heathcoate.

"Still languishing in those foreign banks. But the government thinks all of it can be retrieved."

"Where did he die?"

"In a practice bullring in a little village outside of Sao Paulo, Brazil."

"The fugitive's Mecca. What was he doing in a bullring?"

"He fell into it. Or was pushed into it. Seems no one actually *witnessed* the event. They were all watching some potential young Manolete hone his skills, and then the bull was turning and charging the unfortunate schlump who was flat on his back in the dust. VanRoyer got to his feet just as the bull hit him. Impeccable timing on the bull's part. Tossed him around the ring like a dishrag, gouging a hole in him with his horns every so often for good measure. They say the bull killed him in the first minute and then simply played with his body like some new toy."

A CORNER OF HEATHCOATE'S BRAIN WAS NOW HINTING to him that Swannie Brookings had not been hunched over Charlie's console all morning getting round-shouldered and bleary-eyed for no good reason. She knew the surest and quickest way out of the tedium of obits and hospital birth reports was to hitch her wagon to a promising investigative piece, even if she had to compromise for a co-byline and consent to do most of the legwork. Editors never coddled or encouraged rookies; they just sat back calmly and waited for the cream to rise, watched for somebody to break from the pack. It didn't cut any ice with them to dangle your Harvard degree under their noses (which was what Brookings had), or bend ears quoting entire pages of *The Canterbury Tales* verbatim (which Brookings likely could, because Heathcoate knew she was a Chaucer freak and had Dickens' novels piled a foot-high on her desk). What washed with editors was action, not talk; present deeds, not past performances.

And so with this in mind, it did not surprise Heathcoate one ounce worth when Swannie Brookings leaned across his desk and said in a confidentially low voice, "Heathcliffe, I think we should tackle this one."

What "this one" was, and what about it was worth "tackling" wasn't at all clear to Heathcoate. But he reminded himself that anyone who survived Harvard and Chaucer all in the same lifetime was capable of original thought and wouldn't all that often turn out the fool, so he told the young woman to elaborate on just what this one was and how she felt it should be tackled.

"See, Heathcliffe, we have here a probable paradigm of sin," said Swannie Brookings, her young, Harvard eyes flashing with evil recognized.

"Well, let's just say *possible* paradigm for the time being," he told her. "To say probable is to be a bit over-confident just at this juncture."

"Possible. Okay, I'll grant that for now."

"So, what do we have for starters?" Heathcoate said.

"For starters, we have Stangle, Seymour, Zielinski and VanRoyer. The Four Horses Asses of the Apocalypse. All of them quite guilty of criminal acts, but not one arrested, tried, judged guilty, or punished. The paradigm is extended by virtue of the fact that all of them died isolated deaths that had the appearance of being accidents. Well, Seymour's death wasn't *completely* isolated, inasmuch as he was shot in a public place, a liquor store, but he *had become isolated* in that he died out of general public view."

"Go on, Swannie."

"When I start blowin' smoke, you'll let me know, right? Okay. Now, statistics tell us that when similar acts of violence occur in a short time-frame, most often they involve either only a single perpetrator, or a number of perpetrators working in conspiracy."

"*Nolo contendere.*"

"Your use of the Latin is a bit non seq., Heathcliffe, but I'll let it pass," said Swannie Brookings, causing Heathcoate to visibly wince. He'd forgotten she'd been a devil of a Latin student, and Heathcoate himself couldn't tell a Latin root from the one on the end of a scallion. He told her to continue with her paradigm.

"Right now, I'm thinking along the lines of a conspiracy," the young woman said. "Maybe, Heathcliffe, just maybe, we have here some secret, ultra-conservative society dedicated to snuffing out unpunished, white-collar criminals."

"A possibility," Heathcoate told her. "With a cutesy, vaguely inferential name like The Omega Society or The Terminus Club."

"They meet semi-regularly," said Brookings, continuing the thesis, "in private homes, nominate and discuss potential victims: Hell, they may even vote on them."

"And when they've decided on a candidate?"

"When they have their target white-collar scofflaw," said Brookings, "they formulate a strategy to eliminate him . . ."

". . . and then draw straws to see who does the job."

"Heathcliffe, you're on my wavelength," said Brookings.

Heathcoate felt he'd caught an inconsistency in the cool, Harvard logic. "What about the liquor store killing? I mean, you'd think an intelligent, deliberative body like the one you suggest wouldn't want to get that risky."

"You mean the cops showing up. Sure. But maybe *not so risky* when you consider the lousy response-time for the bluecoats in this city. It's something around eighteen minutes, fifth worst in the nation in cities with populations over 100,000. Did you know Charles Seymour stopped at that liquor store twice a week for over a year? Every Tuesday and every Friday? He did. You could set your Bulova by him. And Seymour got *his* cleaned out of the fact that he became a creature of habit, at least where that downtown liquor store was concerned."

Heathcoate had to admit he liked her idea just fine. Except for the fact that it came equipped with a built-in deadend, which he mentioned to her now.

"Swannie, what makes rich men rich also makes poor men poor."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means the thing that allows secret societies to operate anonymously is their secrecy. The members may place *themselves* in jeopardy, but their existence as an *organized group* is never jeopardized."

"Never say never, Heathcliffe."

"So what's our plan?"

"Well, Heathcliffe, howzabout we stir up the cauldron with a think-piece. Something on the order of 'White-Collar Deaths: Coincidence or Conspiracy?' You like that for a headline?"

"Lurid," said Heathcoate.

"Ah, but a grabber. We plant the seed and then hide behind the old oak tree in the garden and see whether anything pops up out of the ground."

"And if our secret ultra-conservative society decides to come after us in retaliation over being exposed, an old oak tree isn't a very good hiding place."

"Just a figure of speech, Heathcliffe."

"Well then, let me put in more graphic terms. What if we find our cars being blown up in parking lots and bullets whizzing past our ears in the dark of night and people forcibly taking us for rides to distant

roadhouse taverns?"

Once more the eyes flashed with defiance as the woman sought to make her courage contagious. "Ah, Heathcliffe," she told him, "then, we know we're *on to something!*"

SWANNIE BROOKINGS' THINK-PIECE APPEARED ON THE front page of the *Sun-Herald* six days later, along with grisly photographs of all four death scenes and small inset photos of the victims. Whether or not it was legitimate journalism or contained a grain of truth, two additional press runs had to be ordered for the city edition.

The article also caught the attention of a Greek police detective, and the officer wasted no time letting Heathcoate know about it.

"Herve Kritsonis, Heathcoate. I read where you people down there are gearing up for a pilgrimage to Lourdes over all these unconnected deaths we've been having lately."

"Just a one-time think-piece," said Heathcoate in an attempt to smooth a few obviously ruffled feathers.

"Thinking is what you call it? With phrases like 'the secret-society menace' and 'death by committee' and 'bloodied white collars'? Now, I call *that* about as thoughtful as six gorillas swinging on a rubber tire. You drum up a theory floating across the sky on a cloud, run it out onto the streets to sell for a quarter and all you do is panic the *populus*."

"And what if there *is* a secret society going off to bimonthly meetings to draw up lists of unpunished white-collar criminals?" interjected Heathcoate.

"Look. If there's a possibility there *is* a horde of quiet fanatics out there, don't you think it would have been better to catch them with their horns out and their pants down? Not that we have the element of surprise on our side anymore what with you people blowing the whistle.

"But, Heathcliffe, this is all academic now, because no such secret society exists. In Hollywood, maybe, where the moguls pay big money to guys living in stucco houses in Santa Barbara to write them outlandish tales of the unexpected and the implausible, but not down here in the real world."

"And also, you've upset my mother. See, my mother is a sweet little thing with the build of a bocce ball who's never harmed a soul in her life. All her life, she has been perfectly content to go to her weekly socials at the Greek Orthodox and make her kapama and lamb riganato and egg-lemon soup and keep up with her English language classes at the junior college. She doesn't want to harm people and she doesn't

want disorder in her life. She just wants her grandchildren to go to college and her son to make Detective First Grade and visit her once a week for baklava and Greek coffee."

"How have we upset your mother?" Heathcoate asked.

"She's read the article and now she thinks I'll be fired because someone other than the police is doing my work. She feels I've been dishonored and now the mayor will storm across the street from his office and rip my badge from my chest and then I'll be taken to the town square and shot. She's old country, what can I tell you, Heathcliffe? But your article has her ranting and moaning all over the house and she doesn't go to her socials anymore because all her friends will shame her over the fact that someone else is doing her son's work. It's all very complicated, Heathcliffe, to say the least. But the upshot of it is I don't want you and this Swannie Brookings guy doing any more think-pieces on what we down here have judged to be accidental deaths."

"Swannie Brookings is a woman," said Heathcoate.

"Man, woman, gumball machine, I want you to cease and desist. And if you don't cooperate, there are things I can do, you know? No more press parking in front of the courthouse, no more looking the other way when you're zooming forty-five in a thirty m.p.h. zone on your way to a story, no more suppressing news sources involving criminal matters, no more . . . well, I think you get the picture, Heathcliffe."

"We'll cooperate," said Heathcoate. "This wasn't meant to be a series of pieces anyway, just a one-shot deal."

"Good. I'll appreciate it and my mother will appreciate it, too. I mean, she isn't all that thrilled about how well I do my job as it is. You should hear her, Heathcliffe. 'You catcha the crim's and thena the judgea he lets go free. Inna-outa, jus' likea getta hamburgs at the Jack-Inna-Boxer. An' mosta you donna catch. Mostra crim's go a-robbta and and a-shoota and bing-bang ona head and geta purse-money, likea from Mrs. Maraboucha two times and she breka hippa-bone the secon' time and polizia still donna catcha!' It goes on like that all the time for me, Heathcliffe. My brother the doctor heals people and my other brother the mailman never loses letters and my oldest brother the priest gets everybody into heaven. But me, the poliziotto, all I ever do is lose the crims and fire my pistol into my foot. And worse, my mother now holds me directly responsible for Mrs. Maraboucha's broken hip. But I am belaboring, Heathcliffe. I appreciate the ceasing and desisting, I really do. So-long."

Heathcoate put up the phone with the unsettling feeling he was a

little bit criminal himself. After all, a legitimate case could be made against him for having indirectly turned a nice, little, bocce-ball-shaped mother against her son because she felt others had been assigned to do his job. He was beginning to feel an apology was in order so that the record could be set straight that Mrs. Kritsonis' son was a good cop who could handle his own work.

The city telephone directory showed five Kritsonis'. The four suburban addresses doubtlessly belonged to Herve and his three brothers. The fifth was on Adelphi Street in an older section of town called in colloquy Serb Hill because it was still a huddled, self-sustaining enclave of Greeks and Serbo-Croatians. To be sure he had the right Kritsonis, Heathcoate thumbed forward to the M's and found the sole Maraboucha, the old woman who had exchanged her purse for a broken hip. She lived only two blocks from Adelphi Street, and her friend, whose sons were all successful and respected, with the exception of the one who continually shot himself in the foot while his criminals escaped scot-free in fits of laughter.

Swannie Brookings said she wanted to come along for the ride because she'd never heard of a newspaper reporter who ever apologized to anyone and didn't want a little bit of history to slip past unnoticed. All the six miles up to Serb Hill, the anticipatory smirk never left her lips.

ADELPHI STREET WAS A NARROW, SLOPING AVENUE OF tightly packed row houses with windows of stained glass and small flower boxes, almost none with garages because the houses had been built in an era when almost no one in this working class section of town owned an automobile. Even now precious few cars stood parked at the curbing all the long way up and down Adelphi Street. Most of the humans living behind the delicate, religious windows were women and most of the women were widows who had never been allowed driver's licenses by their dead husbands, and so had no need or reason to keep an automobile. What they kept, almost solely, were the old family homes as quiet caretakers, the lonely punishment for having outlived their mates.

Heathcoate parked on the downgrade in front of 2622 Adelphi Street, cramping his wheels against the high curbing. Down the hill, a Seniors' Vanpool vehicle was letting off an old woman. She made her slow, hobbling way up the walk to her house with the aid of an aluminum walker, while a community services worker followed carrying two small sacks of groceries.

"I wonder if Mrs. Kritsonis uses that?" said Swannie Brookings.

"Uses what?"

"The Community Services Vanpool. It seems so degrading to me."

"Smoothes out the grades in the hills for her, you mean? Gives her a warm, comfortable ride to the Serb Hill business district where she can shop, or see her doctor, or have her teeth fixed, or get a book from the library? Degrading like that, you mean?"

"Young, female reporter contracts foot-in-mouth disease," said Brookings.

"Just do us both a favor and withhold your judgment on the worth of community service vanpools until you're a seventy-year-old retired newspaper reporter with fading eyesight and bad legs," Heathcoate said and let the rubbing in go at that.

As they walked up the front steps, he hoped this wouldn't turn out to be a long or confusing apology. The woman's son had already given Heathcoate fair warning about her broken English, which meant her understanding of it might be even worse. He'd interviewed his share of Third World refugees and he knew the helpless feeling of trying to communicate with them on matters as simply as the spelling of their names and the pronunciations of the towns and provinces from which they had been expatriated. Hoping for the best and not the worst, Heathcoate gripped the ancient, rusted bell-crank set in the abdomen of the door and gave it a turn, setting off a thin, anemic ringing somewhere inside the house.

A minute passed and then another. The vanpool truck went by, challenging the hill of Adelphi Street with difficulty. Heathcoate cranked the bell twice more. The old woman was likely somewhere in the rear of the house; or was so suspicious or afraid she wasn't going to answer the bell at all under any circumstances.

And then Heathcoate saw the thin muslin curtain move behind the square of stained glass in the upper half of the door. He heard Swannie Brookings gulp a small volume of air like a deep sea diver breaking the water's surface. It wasn't anything she'd seen; the hint of a human head was fractured a thousand times by the thick stained glass. It was more the sudden rustling of the muslin that startled her.

But there was nothing at all to fear in the round, chubby face of the woman who opened the door, nor anything intimidating in the comical, apologetic expression that said the woman had caught herself being somewhat foolish for letting guests wait on her doorstep so long.

"You comea to fix the televish, yes? I puta pies inna the *fourno*. I notta hear bell."

"It's Greek for oven," said Swannie Brookings quickly. "She's baking pies in the oven and she didn't hear the bell."

"Pleasea, you come in, fixa the televish now. It makea too mucha

the faces.”

“Her screen is fuzzy and it’s giving her double images,” Brookings said.

Heathcoate shot his translator a deadly little grin and then said, “Mrs. Kritsonis, we’re not television repairmen. We’re newspaper reporters.”

“No fixa the televish?”

“No, Mrs. Kritsonis. We’re here to talk with you about your son, Herve.”

The baleful eyes at once turned apprehensive and suspicious, as though it were obvious to the woman that her son had again done something in the performance of his job that was unforgivable. “Herve? Whatta he do now makea his momma havea shame? Eh? He losea more crim’s? He breaka hippa-bone ‘nother olda woman? Ah, that’s no way to makea toppa polizia man, I tella you a-that. Comea inside. Bringa you girl-helper and I givea you coffee and thena you fixa the televish.”

Heathcoate didn’t make a second attempt to explain they were not there to work magic on her television set. He only hoped the woman would notice they had no tool boxes or dollar signs flashing from their eyes and so were there for other purposes.

THEY FOLLOWED MRS. KRITSONIS DOWN A SHORT HALL-way and then fought their way through the maze of a beaded curtain into what struck Heathcoate as a very cluttered, claustrophobic livingroom.

“Pleasea, you sitta down. Nice, onna couch. Not fixa televish now. Havea coffee first, H’okay?”

And then, in scurrying little steps, the old woman was gone, which in a Greek household with guests meant the first order of business was coffee all around. And this was a Greek household in the traditional sense. On the narrow mantel above the fireplace were propped icons in the shape of wooden plaques, all elaborately painted and looking centuries old, each portraying the face of a different saint. Beneath each one was a small oil lamp, which, likely at night or on special religious occasions, illuminated each icon in its own halo of light. And, of course, in the mantel’s center, one larger picture of Christ hanging above the largest lamp. Every wall was draped with at least one small tapestry, which in former times were likely purchased in some crowded bazaar for a few pennies, but were now family heirlooms worthy beyond mere price. Even the couch was draped with a handwoven spread of intricate, interlocking geometric patterns.

"Really Greek, huh, Heathcliffe? And take a whiff of the air. Smell the spearmint and the garlic? Ghost smells. They've probably been here in the air as long as she has."

The old woman returned with a large tray. It held a battered steel coffee urn and three dainty cups on tiny saucers. The tray also held two glasses filled with a clear liquid. Spoons were balanced across their mouths, with a glob of something in each one.

Swannie Brookings saw Heathcoate's puzzlement over the glasses and spoons and whispered to him, "Greek snack. You eat the jam from the teaspoon and then swirl the spoon in the water and drink it. Then, we'll be served the coffee. Steal yourself for it, Heathcliffe. It's probably a couple days old and could melt the deck of a battleship. The Greeks like it strong."

The jam was apricot, homemade and very tasty, Heathcoate had to admit. He put three spoonsful of sugar into his coffee, and Mrs. Kritsonis shot him a mild frown at being such a pantywaist. Swannie Brookings took hers neat, with a disgustingly superior look plastered all over her face.

Once they were congenially into the ritual of coffee-taking and the old woman looked more relaxed in their presence, Heathcoate began to explain the reason for their visit. "Mrs. Kritsonis, we wrote a newspaper story recently that may have cast the police in bad light by suggesting they needed help in solving a series of crimes."

"My son is *polizia*," said Mrs. Kritsonis. "Sometimes, no catcha *crim's*. My friend, Mrs. Maraboucha downa the street, she'sa breaka *hippa-bone*, lose-a purse-money and the *polizia* no catcha *crim*'. My son, Herve, maybe nota so good atta catcha *crim's*. Maybe shoulda havea different work to do, not *polizia* work. Maybe he'sa be better drivea truck, or makea the pizza pies atta a bakery shop."

"The worsta *crim's* of all issa fancy-suit *crim's*. Makea lotsa money and drivea big, shiny cars longa like a-fish, alla time no paya taxes and steal froma little people notta so smart as them."

"White collar criminals," said Heathcoate.

The old woman's eyes flashed with instant recognition of the term. "Ah, that'sa the ones! Whidea collar *crim's*! *Nicea*, soft whidea hands notta do harda work onea day inna der lives, but gotta brains *you bet* . . . brains to cheata people and do fancy business witha the bookkeep and notta pay taxes and run away anda go live inna 'nother country . . ."

The leathery Greek face was definitely growing red around its edges with anger and indignance. Her gnarled, stubby fingers were trembling and causing her coffee cup to rattle its saucer. And then the

embarrassed, stupid smile surfaced on her lips, saying she had been tricked into a foolish display of temper of which God would sternly disapprove. "I wash a cups now," she said to her guests, rising and replacing the cups and saucers on the serving tray with great care. And then, as though senility were an alien state she now entered and left frequently like some border traveler, she said, "And then a you make fixa the televish."

Left abruptly alone by their hostess, Heathcoate and Swannie Brookings stared back at each other until the boredom began to set in and then their eyes unfixed and began to seek out things of interest in their surroundings.

Heathcoate first noticed the newspapers, chiefly because there was such an incredible lot of them. They were piled in uneven, untied stacks in two corners of the livingroom, the pages of their separate sections raggedly uneven to suggest the papers were not merely being collected but read, and read thoroughly.

Heathcoate went across the room and began to examine the papers in one of the stacks. To be sure, there were old copies of the *Sun-Herald*. But more prevalent, and oddly so, were back issues of some of the country's major dailies: the *Boston Globe*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *New York Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and numerous others. And what was also odd about them were the gaping holes where news articles had been, not clippings from Food Sections of chicken casseroles, or from Arts and Entertainment Sections of movie reviews, but all hard news items taken from the newspapers first few pages, plus their continuation columns on succeeding pages.

"What's this with being so nosey, Heathcliffe?" Swannie Brookings said from across the room.

"There's more newspapers than at a C.Y.O. paper drive."

"Mrs. Kritsonis is taking English improvement courses at the junior college, Heathcliffe. Maybe they're part of a course project."

"Maybe."

And there was *another* element here in this room that had Heathcoate feeling just a bit uneasy. There was a peculiar aroma he hadn't yet identified, and it had been there the instant he'd walked into the house. And it wasn't the pungent smell of spearmint or garlic or the strong coffee. It was something like the acrid smell that remained on your fingertips after you'd ignited an entire sheath of bookmatches by mistake. Sulphur. But there was *another* smell, one with a bitter bite against his nostrils when he took a deep sniff of air.

He could have used more time to pinpoint it, but his train of thought

was derailed by Mrs. Kritsonis' return to the livingroom. "Must go shoppa now. I call Vanpool come getta. No worry you abouta televish. Herve come over anda fixa. Banga atta the back like lasta time, makea work goot. Shoulda maybe be a televish fixa-man and notta polizia. You go now, me go now."

"We can drive you, Mrs. Kritsonis," said Swannie Brookings.

"Vanpool takea. No costa. City pay. Takea there, bringa back. Makea conversh witha my friends."

"You have errands to run, we understand, Mrs. Kritsonis," Heathcoate said abruptly now, like a rude guest who had suddenly recognized his welcome was being vastly overstayed. "Come on, Ms. Brookings. We'll leave now."

"Wha . . . ?"

"We'll find our own way out," said Heathcoate, dragging an astonished Swannie Brookings by one arm while with the other he fought the beads of the hallway curtain aside, continuing to keep her firmly in tow until they were back in the car.

"Sure, haul me around like some kid's toy truck on a string," said an indignant Brookings, flouncing around in her seat in a pose that was part pout and part steaming rage. "Let's see you get into Harvard without money, lineage or a pair of pants!"

She was in such a state, she began coughing and couldn't stop.

"Easy, Camille," Heathcoate told her, whomping her on the back a few times until she caught her breath and the coughing subsided. "I had to get us out of there so we could get back in."

"Get back in? We were *already* in."

"I mean back in *alone*. After Mrs. Kritsonis leaves."

"That's breaking and entering, Heathcliffe. Also, the front door is deadbolted, which means so is the rear. And you didn't even *apologize* to her. I mean, that's the sole reason I came shotgun on this trip, to see you red-faced and ashamed and supinated at her feet."

"The opportunity to apologize never arose."

"How long does it take to say 'I'm sorry'? And she has a sticker in her front window that says she's a member of Block Watch."

"We'll go around to the rear," Heathcoate told her. "Greeks always have grape arbors and olive trees in their backyards. Perfect concealment."

HE SWUNG THEM IN A U-TURN AND TOOK THEM BACK up Adelphi Street. At the top of the hill, he did another U and headed back down. Six houses from where they'd been parked previously, Heathcoate pulled into the curb and killed the engine.

"What are we? Waiting for Godot here?"

"The Vanpool," said Heathcoate. "It'll be showing up in a few minutes to take Mrs. Kritsonis down to the District to shop."

"Ah, I see. Then, we break and enter. In broadass daylight. With dozens of neighbors with nothing better to kill their time except look out of their windows. Heathcliffe, when we're out pounding the bricks looking for work—I mean, *after* we've posted outrageous bail—I don't want you to be walking on the same side of the street with me. I just don't want even *that much* association with you."

The Community Services Vanpool loomed in Heathcoate's rearview mirror. It passed by and came to a halt in front of 2622 Adelphi. Mrs. Kritsonis emerged from the house taking serious, mincing little steps as though to be a moment late for something provided free of charge by the city was another shameful sin.

In another minute the van was off down Adelphi Street and out of sight.

"Let's go, Brookings. She might be buying out every shop in the district, or she might just be going for a quart of milk. We may not have much time."

"One-to-five? That isn't much time? And that's if we don't *take* anything, Heathcliffe. We take *property*, well, you can just tell my jailer to throw away my key."

Walking down Adelphi, they passed no one on the street. In the gate, up the walk, around the north side of Mrs. Kritsonis' house to the back. There was no grape arbor and no olive trees, but drooping plum trees and pole beans everywhere made it seem as though they were inside a green cave.

The back porch was enclosed and its screen door was unlatched.

"Deadbolted, Heathcliffe. I told you so."

The glassed, upper half of the inner door was divided into six small panes. Heathcoate took out a handkerchief, wrapped it around his right fist and gave the pane nearest the doorknob one sudden jab. It broke nicely and with very little noise.

"If you've severed an artery, Heathcliffe, do not consider me a blood donor."

The acrid smell was even stronger in the kitchen. Swannie Brookings' nose was quivering like a rabbit's. "Whatever that smell is, Heathcliffe, I wouldn't spread it on a cracker."

"I think it's coming from one of the rooms here at the back of the house. I remember the odor being much weaker when we were in the livingroom."

"I do, too," said Brookings. "Down that hallway?"

"Would seem so."

Opposite the doorway leading out of the kitchen was a padlocked door. It bespoke itself as a rear bedroom.

"Oh-oh," said Swannie Brookings.

"Piece of cake," said Heathcoate. "Just take off the hasp with a screwdriver or butterknife."

Swannie Brookings had wandered on down the hallway to look behind all the other doors. "Bathroom, closet, closet. And a stairway leading upstairs. But the smell is strongest right here at this padlocked door."

"I know."

"I'll go rummage for a screwdriver," said Swannie Brookings, with just the faintest emergence of glee in her voice. "So what if they hang us a little higher for breaking through another door? Hanged is hanged."

Removing the hasp took only a minute. It would be weakened when Heathcoate replaced the screws, but he didn't think the old woman would notice any tampering.

Heathcoate pushed open the door. For a moment, they performed their Alphonse and Gaston act. Finally, it was Heathcoate who broke the threshold first.

The only word Heathcoate could think of for what they had just done was *invade*. They had invaded someone's privacy and they had also entered what could only be described as another world. There was a mock-altar and candles everywhere and what looked like a double-edged dagger laying on a swatch of red velvet. Centered on the altar was a smallish kettle made of cast iron. Heathcoate leaned over its mouth and sniffed at it lightly. Sulphur and henbane from a small mound of burned seed piled inside the cauldron.

"God-all-hemlock, Heathcliffe," said a flabbergasted Swannie Brookings, "she's got one of *everything*. A conjure bag, a copy of the *Book of Shadows* and the damn thing looks like it's two hundred years old if it's *a day*. Coffin nails, rabbits' feet, lodestones, voodoo medallions. And the *vials*, Heathlife! She's even got them all labeled! Mandrake, monkshood, nightshade, thorn apple, hemlock, Attraction Oil, Love Oil, lavender . . . holy Beelzebub, there's even one here labeled *graveyard dust!* That awful smell is here, but I can't tell where it's coming from."

"The cauldron on the altar," said Heathcoate. "She's been burning henbane seeds. A mild hallucinogen. The witch's high."

Heathcoate found a small wastebasket and dumped its contents out onto the threadbare carpet. There were stubs of candles and burned

matchends. There was also a toy automobile; a small charm in the shape of a pistol, a photograph of an airplane cut from a magazine or a consumer catalog, and a tiny, porcelain bull.

Swannie Brookings made the immediate connection. "Charles Seymour, Otto Zielinski, Arthur VanRoyer and Jeremy Stangle. God, look at the toy car. She must have come down on it with a fifty-pound sledgehammer."

THEY FOUND THE SHOEBOXES IN A CORNER OF A CLOSET. One contained news clippings of suspected perpetrators of white-collar crimes, to which were paperclipped the accounts of their deaths. A suspected retirement home embezzler in Hartford, Connecticut had drowned in a freak waterskiing accident at a mountain lake. A meat procurement sergeant at a military post in Washington State charged with stealing tons of meat and poultry from the post commissary for resale, but missing, had turned up as a hit-and-run victim in another state, struck down by a truck transporting frozen turkey hindquarters. A disbarred Roanoke, Virginia lawyer who specialized in handling and mishandling trust accounts as a probate and estate attorney, had turned up as a fatality in a single-auto, single-occupant car-crash when his foreign sports car failed to negotiate a sharp curve on a country road. Both man and car sailed airborne over a grassy mound and fell in a fiery crash in a rural cemetery. There were others, too many to count, including the accumulated paperwork on the criminality and deaths of the four local men, all of it neatly filed in a shoebox whose top was marked with a bold, black X from a wide-tipped felt pen.

Swannie Brookings was examining the contents of the second shoebox. "More wire service articles about crimes or suspected crimes. But no death notices. Computer thieves, disreputable city managers and port commissioners, fraudulent pastors, executive search and career counseling charlatans, phony physicians and faith-healers. And *would you believe it*, even an acquitted mortician accused of taking jewelry from bodies designated for cremation! I think there are hexes in progress."

"Some of the dates on these news stories go back as far as seven years," Heathcoate told her. "Looks like the old gal's been at it quite a while."

"I wonder if she keeps a witchmobile in storage someplace, Heathcliffe? You know, for rolling into small towns to cast a few quickie spells, curses and hexes for pocket money."

"Whatever, it looks as if we've just invalidated our theory on the ultra-conservative secret society in our midst."

"And found the Black Witch of Serb Hill in the process. A helluva expose-piece, don't you think, Heathcliffe?"

"I wonder."

"We should go with it, Heathcliffe."

"We should discuss it a little more, I think."

They replaced the shoeboxes in the closet and left everything in the room just as they'd found it. The hasp held well enough in its old screw-holes and only a close examination of it by Mrs. Kritsonis would reveal it had been tampered with.

The broken pane in the kitchen door was another matter. Swannie Brookings swept up the glass from the floor and found a trash basket in the cabinet under the sink. Heathcoate removed the few remaining jagged pieces from around the molding so that no one would be inadvertently cut. Perhaps the old woman's memory would play tricks on her when she discovered the hole, sigh over having been so neglectful, and then merely have it replaced.

Trudging back up Adelphi to the car, they passed the mailman on his way down. Besides a fistful of letters, bills and circulars, he had a good armload of newspapers. There wasn't any doubt in Heathcoate's mind about their destination.

Ten minutes later, as they sat in their car watching, the Community Services Vanpool returned. Mrs. Kritsonis emerged, waved to her friends inside the van and then with the same bitty, no-nonsense steps, marched back inside her house. The van departed and once more all was quiet and serene on Serb Hill.

"So, are we going to go with the story or not?" Swannie Brookings wanted to know in terms that were very certain.

"And queer it?" Heathcoate hedged. "I mean, she seems to be doing a pretty good job at hexing and all. Coincidence, fate, happenstance, black magic—who knows what kind of label to hang on it. But she isn't hurting anyone, except those who deserve to be hurt."

"But *what a human interest story!* We could even drag down a Pulitzer nomination for feature-writing, Heathcliffe!"

"And embarrass a city police detective whose mother practices witchcraft because she thinks her son isn't a very good cop. My thinking is, whatever Herve Kritsonis and the rest of the world doesn't know won't hurt them."

"You mean we *swallow it?*"

"I think so."

"Aw, *Heathcliffe!*"

"Look, no one will ever collect any proofs that all these deaths *weren't* simply actuarial fact, just an unassociated collection of human

souls whose numbers came up."

"I suppose you're right there," said a glum Swannie Brookings, her tone saying to him she was now willing to let a potential Pulitzer prize fly from her hands like a bird nursed back to health and now meant to take wing according to nature's laws.

HEATHCOATE TURNED THE KEY IN THE IGNITION, UN-cramped his wheels and headed down off Serb Hill, perhaps for the last time. As he drove he made a mental note to call a repair shop and have someone stop by to fix Mrs. Kritsonis' "televish," have the repairman tell her the work was being paid for by her dutiful son the police detective, and then bill the paper for it.

"Prophetic little name for a street, don't you think, Swannie?" he said to the girl as he motored them out of view of Serb Hill. "Adelphi Street?"

"How so, Heathcliffe?" she said idly, not really on any wavelength now, except perhaps that of a couple of good, stiff drinks and a hero sandwich somewhere.

"Pythia was a Delphic priestess who cast her spells and made prophesies while she was under the influence of burning henban seeds."

"Learn a fact a day," the girl said and then settled back quietly for the long ride back to town.

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

What famous fictional detective lived at 33 Rue Dunot in Paris?

Edgar Allan Poe's creation, C. Auguste Dupin.

Under a pseudonym, Walter Gibson wrote 283 novels about what famous crimefighter?

The Shadow, by Maxwell Grant.

What is the real name of The Saint?

Leslie Charteris' creation's given name is Simon Templar.

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The scam was obvious. Marsh was going to take the money and run, disappear and live the good life while everyone thought he was dead. Not if Joshua Browning had anything to say about it. The reporter smelled a good story here, and he was determined to track down the truth!

Greenearth

by WILLIAM BABULA

"I'VE GOT THE EVIDENCE RIGHT HERE," JOSHUA BROWNING said as he waved the thick file in front of his editor's melancholy face. "He's planning to disappear without a trace. It's the old scam . . ."

"Okay. Okay," Carl Coombs finally said. "Go. Get the hell out of here."

THE SMALL TWIN-ENGINE PLANE SUDDENLY DIPPED toward the ice blue Atlantic and Joshua Browning's stomach started doing acrobatics. One of the other two passengers shouted a curse at the pilot.

"Damn Newfies can't fly worth a piss," Joe Oates of the *Toronto Star* fumed as his face went a deep crimson.

It was hard for Joshua Browning to keep his mind on his story when he believed his life was in danger from the lunatic pilot.

When the plane regained altitude and leveled off the two men and one woman in the passenger section settled back in their seats. The drone of the engines continued reassuringly on. Browning rubbed his thick brown beard and wished that he were back on the Air Canada 727 that had flown him over the blue and white expanse of the Gulf of St. Lawrence from Montreal to Gander, Newfoundland. At least on the 727 he could push a red button with a stick female figure on it and get a flight attendant—of either sex—to bring him a Bloody Mary. But at the Gander airport this small plane had been waiting for him, courtesy of the Greenearth Society.

The elegant blonde woman sitting in front of Browning, Phyllis West of Channel Six News in New York, snapped open her purse and handed a large button to each of her two companions. As she turned around Browning caught a trace of expensive perfume. The woman had the kind of face, attractive, with regular features, and just enough age lines to let the public know she had experience, that Browning expected to see on the local evening news in every American city nowadays—one of the most visible results of the industry's affirmative action programs.

Joe Oates looked at the button, shook his massive gray-crowned head in disgust, and tried to shift his large body in his seat as if he could escape Ms. West and her enthusiasms.

The engines seemed to grow noisier and the vibrations increased inside the plane.

Holding it in his hand like an oversized religious medal, Browning stared into the dark saucer eyes of the harp seal cub on the "STOP THE SLAUGHTER" button. The eyes were even larger and more beautiful than Phyllis'. Around him he could hear Ms. West and Joe Oates arguing about the hunt. Phyllis West wore two of the buttons, one on each pocket of her red plaid coat. Browning looked at the seal eyes on her coat and found that he was having a hard time concentrating on business.

It was an effective campaign, Browning thought as he slipped the button into a pocket and zipped it shut. Then against the cold that the plane's ineffective heater could not dispell, he pulled the fur-lined parka he wore closer about himself. He felt guilty as if he were wrapped in animal skins.

No wonder the Greenearth Society took in more money over the baby harp seal hunt than all other causes combined. Joshua Browning remembered their campaign in Florida—which included a telethon—to save the manatee. With a face like a bloated cow the manatee did not arouse much enthusiasm or donations from the public. But overall Greenearth seemed to do very well. All indications were that

Greenearth was the wealthiest and therefore most influential environmental and anti-cruelty society in the world. Greenearth always seemed to have enough money to do exactly what its leader, Lyon Marsh, wanted, even including the purchase of a Lear jet. Joshua Browning unconsciously felt for the briefcase he had put under his seat. In it was his file, the product of nearly a year of investigation, on Lyon Marsh.

"Browning? You did say your name was Browning?" Joe Oates asked. "What do you think about all this damn fuss over a bit of hunting. Thin the herd and all that?"

"I'm just here to be an objective observer," Browning answered. He wanted to attract as little attention to himself as possible. His story, he believed, would be very different from theirs.

"I don't think you've said whom you're with," Phyllis West said, coldly enunciating each syllable with great precision. Obviously to not be with her on the harp seal issue was to be against her and Browning had just been noted as an enemy. Well he would try to work on that later.

"You might say I'm free lance," Browning explained. His vague answer somehow managed to extricate him from the debate.

THROUGH HIS PORTHOLE WINDOW BROWNING COULD SEE the ice-encrusted Atlantic and the rugged white land to the west where the low mountains of the Long Range sloped up from the sea. The mountains looked like they were covered with shaved ice. He shifted in his uncomfortable seat. Browning did not consider himself to be that large of a man but the seat seemed to have been designed for a slim midget. At six-one he carried a hundred and eighty pounds, between five and ten of which he considered excess weight. At thirty-seven he was beginning to run into the problems of middle-age. Once again he decided to get back to daily three-mile runs, regular workouts at the gym, and an occasional game of racketball or three-on-three half-court basketball. At least up here he could use the extra pounds to help him keep warm.

Unconsciously he ran his fingers through his thick straight brown hair and rubbed his chin with the back of his hand. He was glad he had grown a beard some months ago; it would be hell on his skin to shave in the Newfoundland cold. And women liked it he had found; it went well with his pale blue eyes, olive skin, and slightly askew nose. The beard seemed to smooth out his generally irregular features. And in contrast to his trimmed dark beard, his teeth, the only thing perfect about him, shone with a whiteness usually only found in TV commercials.

"This is going to be a lark," announced the red-faced Oates as he pulled-out a pint bottle of Windsor Canadian whiskey from the inside pocket of his coat. He took a long swallow, wiped his mouth with his sleeve, and asked, "Care for a hit, Miss West? It will warm your . . . spirits." Oates winked lecherously at her.

Ms. West shook her blonde head and flashed her green eyes at the old man of the press.

Oates shrugged his shoulders and turned to Browning. "How about you?"

"No thanks," Browning said reluctantly as he told himself he didn't need a drink that badly. Besides he had an impression to make on Phyllis West and he wasn't going to make it sucking on Oates' bottle.

"Suit yourselves but don't say I never offered you anything," Oates said and then took another pull himself. Before he could swallow it the plane dipped and Oates sputtered and coughed the whiskey out on his own coat.

"God damn Newfies!" he managed to curse.

The plane shuddered as the flaps were adjusted. From the cockpit the pilot called back, "We're coming down towards Gun Bay. On the right there, those dots you see on the ice are the herd."

Browning strained his eyes to make out something distinct below.

"Can't see the pups," the pilot continued. "They're white as fresh snow. The dark specks are the female adults."

The plane veered sharply westward, toward the low but angular mountain range. To Joshua Browning the range looked like crumpled white sheets.

As an afterthought the pilot shouted back to his passengers, "Should be good hunting tomorrow for the men."

"It's barbaric, with no redeeming social value," Phyllis West half said to herself.

"Come on, little lady," Oates responded, "it's a two hundred year old ritual. Would you want to break a tradition like that?"

Having nothing more to say to Oates, Phyllis West turned away from him in disgust.

Joshua Browning could see the collection of buildings that made up the town of Gun Bay. They reminded him of the houses and hotels of a Monopoly game. The plane descended and began to approach a runway at the local airport. The snow-dusted runway was marked by double rows of bright orange balls. The wind stockings showed that there would be a crosswind for the pilot to handle. Browning hoped that Newfie pilots could fly worth piss. The plane came down hard, bounced, and then seemed to skid on the slippery runway before the

pilot had it back in control. Everyone sighed in relief.

The pilot taxied toward the tower, past four helicopters on concrete pads, each painted with the green and blue globe symbol of Greenearth by the rear rotor. Joshua Browning assumed that these were the helicopters that would carry out the journalists and other observers to the hunt. The pilot brought the plane in line with a dozen or so other small planes parked in a neat row and cut the engine.

AS THEY CLIMBED OUT OF THE PLANE AND COLLECTED their baggage, the three passengers could see a crowd of about sixty men, and a few scattered women, in fur parkas gathered by the single airport building. These were the local fishermen who were waiting for the harp seal hunt to begin tomorrow. They moved around, their hoods nearly covering their faces, slapping their gloved hands together. They called out Newfoundland insults at the latest arrivals, sending great plumes of steam from their lips along with their invective. They were an angry mob; angry at Lyon Marsh, Greenearth, and anyone connected with the group of agitators and intruders for putting such a harsh spotlight on their commercial sealing enterprise and threatening their livelihood. Keeping them warm and alive were a dozen metal drums of fire. These protestors were not the kind to carry signs and Joshua Browning saw none.

When Browning, Oates, and Phyllis West moved toward the crowd, it suddenly surged forward like a dark curling wave. The mob was driven to frenzy by the two "STOP THE SLAUGHTER" button Phyllis wore on her coat.

The icy wind struck Browning in the face like a slap and he felt unsure of even which way to turn. The mob seemed to open and close about him harmlessly enough until it finally sucked Ms. West into its vortex. Browning slid his arm between two fur parkas in a futile attempt to reach her.

Suddenly several Canadian Mounties on horseback in their traditional red uniforms came around the side of the building and began to move through the crowd, dividing it easily. Gradually the surge began to recede. Only Joe Oakes, apparently drunk, stayed with the demonstrators and even urged them on, risking the Mounties' wrath.

Finally Joshua Browning had his hand on Phyllis' arm and he tugged her to him.

"Are you okay?" he asked, checking his briefcase at the same time.

"Yes, I'm fine," she said with a weak voice. "Some woman ripped those buttons right off my coat."

"You shouldn't have worn them; it only antagonized the mob."

"Please. Let's get out of here. Isn't there supposed to be a Greenearth car or something?" she said quickly. Phyllis seemed suddenly out of breath as she added, "I'd take a damn dog sled."

"If we could find one."

About fifty yards away a striped green and blue Jeep was spewing smoke out of its exhaust. Browning signaled the driver and the vehicle began to move toward them on massive snow tires that looked more like they belonged on a tractor.

"I think that's our ride to the hotel," Joshua Browning said as he wondered how much equipment Greenearth owned.

Behind them they could barely hear Joe Oates calling to them to stop as the Jeep pulled away.

THE HOTEL WAS A MASSIVE WOODEN BUILDING THAT looked more like a hunting lodge than a hotel. Joshua Browning wondered how much business it usually got in March. They expected more problems with antagonists outside of the hotel but there were no seal hunters in the streets. Joshua unloaded their baggage and then he and Phyllis walked into a huge lobby that was packed with Greenearth supporters who had come to protest the spring harp seal harvest and with representatives of the media who had come to observe, write, record, photograph and film. Most of the people were wearing the "STOP THE SLAUGHTER" buttons and all of the people had drinks in their hands. There were a lot of women in the lobby, some with small children. A bearded long-haired male wearing beads over a navy blue flight jacket spun through the room as if he were dancing. A blond child toddled along after him, reaching for his pants with tiny grasping fingers. Joshua expected the figures to dissolve back to the sixties at any moment, returning to the historical period from which they had obviously escaped.

The desk clerk, a prematurely bald man of about thirty, tried to ignore Browning and Phyllis. Finally Joshua began ringing the small bell while the clerk continued to search around behind the desk.

"Names please," he said as he popped up. "Fill out these forms, please. If you are with Greenearth or guests of Greenearth just note that name next to yours . . . Fine . . . Fine."

They each signed a registration card. The clerk stared at them through his thick glasses and decided to be a bastard and keep these two as far away as possible from each other. He cheerfully gave Browning the third floor rear and Phyllis the second floor in front. The clerk smiled as the two keys he dropped on the desk rang like chimes.

"Sorry," he said, "there's no one to help with the bags." He shrugged his shoulders. "And the lift is out of order."

Joshua struggled up the stairs with most of the baggage pieces, letting them all drop except for his briefcase when he reached the second floor. The landing connected to an interior balcony that ran all the way around above the lobby and led to the rooms. The walls were covered with the tuffed heads of animals which were close enough to touch from the banister.

"I hope we don't have these in our rooms," Phyllis said as she stared into the glass eyes of a bear.

Browning tucked a suitcase under each arm and grabbed another with each hand and followed Phyllis who was hunting for her room. At her door she asked him to wait as she looked in.

"No stuffed trophies," she said. Then she added, "I've got to see about my camera crew."

Joshua got the hint.

"How about a drink later?"

"I'd like that," Phyllis said as she closed the door.

Five minutes later Joshua was in his own small room unpacking. He too had no stuffed animal heads mounted on the walls.

Everything in the room at first glance seemed antique but in reality was just old. The wooden dresser into which he put his folded clothes was scarred and paint was flaking from the walls and the wood floor was rough with splinters. And it was as cold as an icebox. Joshua hung up his pants in the closet on a warped wooden bar. He left on his sweater as he tried to get some heat out of the metal radiator that was next to the bed.

At least he had his own bathroom, most of which was taken up by a huge claw-foot tub that he was sure could not have fit through the door.

Joshua slid the briefcase under the bed and picked up the telephone to call the desk and ask for Lyon Marsh's room. The call was put through but there was no answer. Lyon Marsh, leader of Greenearth, head guru of the "Stop the Slaughter" movement was probably down at the bar.

Heat was clanking through the radiator and Joshua finally began to feel comfortable. Outside his double window the early northern latitude darkness was closing down like a drawn curtain. He locked his door and went downstairs to the bar, passing the same bald clerk who ignored him again.

THE BAR WAS ON THE GROUND FLOOR, DIRECTLY OFF THE

lobby behind western style swinging doors. It was one large room that focused on a massive stone fireplace which held a crackling wood fire. The flames seemed to provide most of the light in the room. The long wooden bar was almost totally obscured by the backs of reporters squeezed together. Every table was full of either press people, TV people, or demonstrators.

Joshua Browning spotted Lyon Marsh in a large group from which he was obviously trying to extricate himself and get to the attractive young woman who was sitting at a small table alone, apparently waiting for him. Joshua recognized her as Marsh's executive assistant whom he had met in Greenearth's New York office several months ago. He searched for a name until he pulled it out of his memory: Michelle Grant.

Working his way through the press of bodies at the bar, Joshua ordered a Canadian whiskey with a splash of soda from the huge handlebar-mustached bartender. Then he made it back to Michelle Grant's table just as Lyon Marsh arrived.

"Mind if I join you?" Joshua asked.

Caught in midstride, Marsha stopped and smiled with a row of magnificent teeth. "Business or pleasure, Browning?" he asked.

"A little bit of both."

"Well I'm glad you made it even if you are looking for skeletons in my closet," Marsh said as he gestured for Joshua to take one of the unsteady wooden chairs.

Marsh was physically impressive. He had a full head of shoe polish black hair and sharp pinpricks of blue eyes that glistened behind contact lenses. His skin was tan and leathery from years spent outdoors and he looked in excellent shape for a man in his fifties. He was impeccably dressed in a dark three-piece suit that seemed out of place in maritime Canada. He wore the ubiquitous button on his left lapel.

"You remember my assistant, Michelle Grant?" he asked as he sat down.

"Of course." Michelle Grant was not the kind of woman Joshua Browning forgot. She had waves of stunning red hair that flowed down to her shoulders, framing her lightly freckled but beautiful face. Her light green eyes, under dark arched eyebrows, seemed to take in everything. She wore a tight sweater that didn't leave much to Joshua's imagination.

With full sensuous lips she smiled at him. Joshua estimated that she was about twenty-seven. She was clever besides beautiful, he knew from the interview he had held with her in which she revealed nothing that he wanted to know.

"Cheers," Marsh said as he lifted his glass.

Joshua and Michelle raised theirs.

Behind them it sounded like at least a half-dozen reporters had started arguing among themselves.

Marsh ignored the noise and instead fixed Browning with those sharp eyes, the eyes of a minister, the eyes of a man of God, and said, "You'll see it tomorrow. It's an unconscionable slaughter. The last mass murder of infant animals on the planet."

Michelle ducked down toward her frothy drink. "It makes me sick to think about it." Then she took a delicate sip which still left a spot of foam on her lower lip. With her unfolded red napkin she dabbed at it.

"Have you seen it before?" Joshua asked the woman.

Before she could answer, Marsh interjected, "This man is going to try to be objective about the hunt. In fact, he wants to be objective about everything." Marsh grinned.

Joshua smiled and nodded his head.

"Next," Marsh continued, "we'll hear how if only the seal pups had the faces of pigs, no one would give a damn. Or how we don't bleed for lambs slaughtered for our chops. Or how the seal hunt provides half the yearly income for the landsmen from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to northern Labrador."

Joshua watched the man warming up. Marsh seemed to be in a pulpit and Joshua in a pew listening to a sermon.

"The Canadian government has set a quota of 200,000 seal pups. If this is kept up the Atlantic harp seal will be extinct in a few years. The government ignores its own scientists who have developed means of accurately counting the infant harp seal population through ultraviolet aerial photography. Most people believe the white fur for which the seals are slaughtered—mainly to line mittens by the way—is for camouflage on the ice floes. But the pups cry almost continuously and lead polar bears and other predators right to them. Actually the white coat allows the pup to absorb solar energy and helps it survive the subarctic cold. But not the clubs of the killers. Because the pup's hair absorbs the ultraviolet spectrum, with ultraviolet film the white pup will show up as a black dot on the reflecting white background. This method of determining population was, of course, not used by the government because it would be accurate and show how low the population actually is."

Lyon Marsh stopped, shook his head, and took a long swallow of his drink, draining the liquor through the melting ice cubes.

"Soon these beautiful creatures will be extinct. Christ, do you know their fur is even used to stuff toys? Can we allow this to happen?"

The rhetorical question hung like a balloon in the air. Moved by Marsh's words himself, Joshua recognized how incredibly effective the man could be.

A small crowd of men and women gathered around the table as Lyon Marsh spoke.

Joe Oates was glaring at Marsh. "You're talking about a rite of passage from adolescence to manhood."

Marsh turned to Oates. "You're talking about the slaughter of week-old animals for their skins. The damn meat is rotting in storage. Maybe we ought to make you eat it."

Phyllis West who stood next to Oates laughed a loud forced laugh.

Suddenly Lyon Marsh got up and the crowd around the table parted to let him pass. Oates fell back as if pushed.

"I see our helicopter coordinator. I want to get the schedules from him from tomorrow."

Lyon Marsh moved down the bar and the crowd, including Phyllis, was drawn along behind him. Joshua let his eyes momentarily drift along with her but he quickly focused on Michelle. He realized that they were suddenly alone. He wondered if he would be able to get any useful information from her this time.

"Well how do you like working for Lyon Marsh?" he tried.

She hesitated then said, "It's . . . exciting. And it's vital work if we are to save the animals. Do you know that the Eastern timber wolf and the Florida alligator were taken off the endangered species list and can now be hunted?"

Joshua, who had learned a lot in the past year said, "Their status is technically 'threatened,'" as he stared into her far away green eyes.

"That's ridiculous," she said and finished her drink. Her eyes seemed to spark.

"You really are a believer," Joshua said, certain that she would be no help to him. "I'd bet that you'd do anything for Lyon Marsh."

There was a long, almost uncomfortable silence. "I'd do anything for God's creatures," she said slowly as Lyon Marsh returned to the table, a stack of schedules in his hand.

"Anything," she added for emphasis.

He wondered if that included helping Marsh with his scam.

JOSHUA BROWNING CLIMBED INTO THE HELICOPTER. THE morning was sunny, deceptively warm, as if spring had truly come. Browning wished that Michelle was with them.

As he shut the door Lyon Marsh warned, "Be careful on the ice. Sections of floes can collapse without warning, dropping you into the

freezing Atlantic."

The helicopter swung out from the shore. At sea there were a number of large boats, seemingly jammed up against the floes. Waves of dark bent figures stalked over the white ice. Far enough out to sea the helicopter settled down on the whelping ice and Marsh led Browning, Oates, and Phyllis West out. Photographers from another helicopter began to set up equipment.

The hunters were clubbing the seal pups and jeering at the reporters, cameramen, and Greenerth people. The adult seals had scattered from wherever humans had passed. Occasionally an adult would stick up her head through a breathing hole in the ice to look around for her pup.

A few females tried to stand their ground, their heads raised in defiance, growling fiercely. But the slaughter and the cries went on. To Joshua it was like being in a frozen circle of hell. He saw one young hunter strike a cub and watched as the red stain spread on the top of the animal's white head.

Small stripped carcasses already covered the ice. Steam rose from each one into the clear bluish air. Joshua began to feel ill and he grit his teeth against the urge. He followed Lyon Marsh over the ice which had been dusted with a layer of snow during the night and now crunched underfoot.

Everywhere the infant animals were dying. It was if a thousand clubs were raised simultaneously to be brought down by one horrifying signal.

There were increasing numbers of female seals frantically huffing across the ice, seeking their young. And all the time the landsmen struck and struck their blows.

Marsh led them over ice that rose like dunes. Before them a half-dozen men were clubbing harp seals pups to death. The mother seals had plunged out of sight. The hunters cursed and one of them spit toward Marsh and the others.

Joshua's stomach began to settle. It was horrible to watch but it was part of his job. Just like collecting the information on Marsh was part of his job.

It was warmer than he had expected. The sun reflected from the white floes like a knife as he followed Marsh over the ice.

"Seen enough?" Marsh asked. "We've got a schedule to follow."

Joe Oates' face was ash white; it had not been the pure rite of passage he had talked about. Phyllis West was remarkably composed.

Joshua nodded his head.

They started walking back to the helicopter. Two hundred yards away from it, Marsh put up his hands and said, "Wait."

Lyon Marsh listened.

"Get back," he ordered.

They all started moving back. Joshua tried to hear something.

Then suddenly fifty yards in front of them the ice seemed to fold. A white ledge slowly rose up and a giant fissure opened. In the middle of their intended path was the sea.

Everyone in the party began to talk nervously.

Marsh tried to calm them, saying, "It's the damn warm weather."

The helicopter was on the other side of the open water.

"Come on," Marsh said as he begun to swing around to his right, circling the deadly sea.

A few moments earlier and they would have been dead, crushed and frozen in the sea, Joshua thought.

"It can happen anytime," Marsh said as he led them to the helicopter.

THE WEATHER CONTINUED WARM AND THE FIRST DAYS of the hunt were a great success for the sealers.

Film star Janet Fuller flew in and was photographed wearing a synthetic fur coat with Lyon Marsh. She turned over a large check from the Hollywood branch of the organization. With this new burst of publicity the locals grew even more hostile.

Joshua sat at the hotel bar in the early afternoon. Things had not been going well for him. He had seen enough of the slaughter to convince him that it should be stopped and he was not interested in going out on the ice floes again to watch the pups being clubbed. Phyllis West had apparently taken up with one of the young Canadian photographers who shared her views and Joshua had to write her off. As for his file on Marsh he had not been able to add anything to it. Still

Joshua started to get up from the bar when he noticed Michelle Grant coming in. Without hesitation she came over to him.

"Can I join you?" she asked.

"Sure. Why don't we get a table?"

She smiled at him and tossed her long red hair. "Still can't get used to a woman bellying up to the bar?"

He tried to look meaningfully into her eyes and said, "I'd rather be alone with you."

"For business or pleasure?"

"Both," Joshua said softly.

He ordered a drink for Michelle and another whiskey for himself and they carried them over to a small table in the corner of the room. A

candle flickered between them. A new log in the fireplace had not caught yet.

"Did you go out today?" Joshua asked.

"Not yet. It's hard to take. But I'm scheduled for a flight out with Marsh this afternoon," Michelle downed some of her liquor and then changed the subject. "Okay, Mr. Browning, what do you think you know?"

"Call me Joshua."

"Fine. I'll call you Joshua. But what do you suspect about Greenearth and Lyon Marsh?"

Joshua leaned back. The glass was cold in his hand. "I'm supposed to ask you the questions." Joshua wondered what exactly this woman was after.

"Not necessarily."

Joshua considered. He wondered how much this woman knew. Everything in the file led him to believe that Lyon Marsh was planning to disappear. The money had been banked out of the country and all the debts rested on the Greenearth organization. The insurance money would be something Marsh would try to get his hands on. With a new identity Marsh could live like a king anywhere from Switzerland to Tahiti. All he had to do was bury Lyon Marsh first. Joshua finally said, "I've been investigating his financial affairs."

Michelle leaned her head back and looked up at the wooden beams of the ceiling. Then she closed her eyes. When she opened them she said, "And you think he's planning to vanish?"

Joshua was shocked by her bluntness. "It's a distinct possibility," he answered.

"I've been nosing around too," she said as she rose abruptly, smoothing the top of her slacks down with the palms of her hands. "I've got to go out to the floes." Michelle was gone before Joshua could say anything else.

He finished his drink and wandered back to the bar, hoping that Phyllis West would materialize. But no such luck. Instead he ended up in a conversation with a drunk Joe Oates who had had a change of heart about the hunt.

Joshua talked to Oates, to a reporter from UPI, to the bartender and he drank too much in the process. When he was thinking about packing it in and going up to his room to sleep it off before dinner, he heard a crescendo of sound suddenly rising through the bar. It culminated in a scream.

Reporters rushed to telephones to call in the story, reminding Joshua of old movies in which newsboys would shout: "Extra! Extra! Read all

about it!"

Word had come that a crevasse had opened up in the ice, swallowing Lyon Marsh. The body was frozen somewhere in the North Atlantic; Marsh had to be presumed dead.

Joshua Browning sobered up as soon as he heard the news. He didn't believe a word of it.

So this was how he was planning to do it, Joshua thought in a self-satisfied, slightly drunken way.

And then he remembered Michelle and wondered about her. He pushed his way through the now crowded bar and saw her standing in the middle of a mob of reporters.

Michelle had been with Marsh, only a few yards away, when it happened.

AS SOON AS HE HAD HIS FILE MATERIALS TOGETHER

Joshua called his editor in New York.

"This is it. This is the time to break the story," Joshua insisted. "We go with it as 'Where is Lyon Marsh?'"

"I don't know," Carl Coombs said sceptically.

"Look, I've got all the information. The Swiss bank accounts . . . No . . . I don't have the numbers . . . The Key-man Insurance policies that will go to Greenearth . . . I tell you this has been planned to the last detail. It's a classic Disappearance Scam."

"I don't know," Coombs repeated.

Editors never knew anything, Joshua thought.

"I have a briefcase full of documents on where money has been tucked away and how Greenearth will be affected. We blow the whistle now and the heat is on and it's our story. I'm sure he's alive."

"I don't know."

Joshua felt a finger poking into his back as he stood up against the bank of phones. He put his hand over the mouthpiece and said to Oates, "Not now."

Oates seemed barely able to stand up.

Joshua turned back to the telephone and started haranguing Coombs. In the middle of a sentence, Oates poked him in the back again.

"What the hell do you want?" Joshua shouted.

"We just got word. The search team pulled Marsh outta the sea. He was frozen in a block of ice, like a gigantic ice cube."

Carl Coombs had just agreed to run Joshua's story.

"I think I'll need a new angle on this one," Joshua said so softly that his editor could barely hear him.

JOSHUA FINISHED PACKING. HE WONDERED IF HE WOULD even get to use the material in the briefcase. Everything now seemed so cut and dried.

Suddenly the phone rang.

It was Michelle Grant, the new head of Greenearth. "Do you want a ride to the airport?"

Joshua met her in the lobby and then walked out with her into a dark overcast morning. The grey sludge sky promised a snowfall before long. Michelle, who looked as beautiful as ever, led him to a wine-colored Mercedes.

"You go in style," he said as he slammed the trunk shut on his luggage.

"Whoever said that animal protectors should be poorly paid?"

"Certainly not the late Lyon Marsh," Joshua said as he slid into the passenger seat.

Michelle started the car then let it idle for a few moments to warm up. Then she turned out on the road that led to the airport.

"What are you up to next?" Joshua asked, making conversation.

Through the windshield the landscape was a smudged white.

"I'm off to Japan—after the funeral—to save the porpoises. Do you know that in every netting thirteen marvelous porpoises die. And there are just a few simple things that could be done. The boats could just 'backdown,' for example. Before hauling up its net the tuna boat eases backward, letting one end of the net sink to allow the porpoises to escape. Or if they used fine-mesh netting, the porpoises would not get their snouts and flippers caught. We can cut the average kill to less than one a netting."

"If anyone can do it, you will," Joshua said. She sounded like Lyon Marsh and the same fires were burning behind her green eyes. He admired her.

Michelle smiled warmly at him. "Remember our conversation yesterday? I wanted to thank you."

"For what?" he asked.

She took a deep breath. The heater in the car was beginning to work. "For confirming what I believed about Marsh."

"You were afraid he was going to disappear and leave Greenearth in financial chaos?" Joshua asked.

"And I bet all along you thought I was in on it." Michelle laughed sharply.

Joshua sunk back into the plush upholstery. "It was a possibility."

The car pulled into the airport entrance, past the main building and tower, past the few locals who bothered to gather that morning.

Michelle drove by the private Lear jet standing like an enormous silver bird. On its tail was painted the great Greenearth symbol of a blue and green globe. Joshua stared at the plane that was now Michelle Grant's and asked: "You were the only one with him when it happened. Was it an accident?"

Michelle pulled up to the small plane that would carry Joshua Browning from Gun Bay to Gander and his flight to Montreal. As she shut off the ignition she said, "Remember when you said I would do anything for Lyon Marsh and I answered that I would do anything for God's creatures?"

"Yes?" Joshua "asked expectantly, hoping for some kind of admission.

"Don't ever forget it," she said as she opened her door with a smile as cold as the Canadian wind that swept down from the Arctic. ●

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

Kung Fu expert Bruce Lee starred as the sidekick to a masked crimefighter in a television series in 1966 and 1967. Whom did he portray?

Kato, The Green Hornet's assistant.

What author used the pseudonyms Matthew Blood, Peter Shelley, Anthony Scott, Sylvia Carson, Asa Baker, Don Davis, Anderson Wayne, among others?

A founder member of the Mystery Writers of America, Davis Dreiser used these pseudonyms and many others.

What do Biff Elliot, Ralph Meeker, and Robert Bray have in common?

They all portrayed detective Mike Hammer in films.

What well-known fictional person did the equally fictional Mary Morstan marry?

Watson. She married Sherlock Holmes' friend and biographer, Dr. John

It was turning dark. A Kona wind had come up, rattling the palm fronds, carrying the acrid odor of volcanic ash from the Big Island. Native Hawaiians consider it a malevolent wind—and this night how right they were!

III Wind

by MIKE TAYLOR

I FOUND HER AT SEVEN ON A FRIDAY EVENING IN SHIP-wreck Kelly's, getting giddy on happy-hour-priced mai-tais. It wasn't very difficult; given the hotel where a tourist is staying, I can generally narrow down the watering holes to half a dozen or less. I'd been on the case slightly more than three hours and it looked like the easiest two hundred bucks I'd make this year.

The girl was Julie Barrington. She was tall (aren't they all nowadays?), recently tanned, dark-haired, and attractive. She was sharing a tiny table and a lot of intimate conversation with a good-looking local beachboy called Keohne. His curly hair, flashing smile and broad shoulders had opened the way to a lot of *haole* ladies' hearts—not to mention their pocketbooks.

The guy Ms. Barrington should have been with, Harold Kramer, her fiancee—my client—was sitting outside in the parking lot, nibbling his fingernails and waiting.

It's a fairly common story around the islands. Mainland women seem peculiarly vulnerable to the romantic figures cut by Hawaiian men. Every so often a young midwestern wife or girlfriend, on vacation in paradise with her beau, will succumb to the lure of the exotic, abandon her inhibitions—and her man—for awhile.

I could have told Harold Kramer all that when he came to my office earlier that afternoon, but I think he sensed most of it already. He was a thin, somewhat bookish type, thick glasses and a cowlick, pallid where he wasn't burned. A junior architect, just out of Iowa State. Smart as a whip, no doubt, but probably not an overwhelming success with the ladies. When he showed me Julie's picture I could have written the script.

They were both from Des Moines, on a two-week holiday package tour. Sort of a trial run for marriage. Neither of them totally comfortable with premarital cohabitation but, heck, you have to keep up with the times.

She had disappeared the previous day, walked off down Waikiki Beach after a spat and never walked back. Harold had gone to the police before coming to see me. They were sympathetic but not very helpful. They knew the syndrome also. With no indication of foul play, they put her name on a missing persons list and reassured Harold that she would show up unharmed and repentant before long.

I agreed with them and warned him he was probably wasting his money. But he insisted, myopic brown eyes determined behind the glasses. All right, I said, I would spend an evening on it. Yes, he could come along, provided he stayed out of the way until I found her.

So here we were.

I PARKED AT THE BAR AND SWAPPED A LITTLE GOSSIP with Cassie Moore, my favorite Aussie saloonkeeper. The big topic of the day was the \$400,000 worth of hot ice taken from the Ilikai Hotel. Some cheeky devil had slipped into a diamond merchants' convention that afternoon, collected nearly a pound of industrial rocks and gemstones, and strolled back out unchallenged. Great security.

I kept a closer eye on my pair. I wanted to talk to the girl, but I didn't propose doing it in front of Keohne. He was too big to start a row with. I waited and let nature take its course.

The restrooms at Kelly's are a long trek from the lounge—through the dining room, take a sharp right and down a short corridor, out of sight of everything. Then, just to see if they were really serious about getting there, the entrances are screened by a bunch of carved teak partitions. Perfect for my purpose.

When Julie headed in that direction I was right behind her. While she was inside I leaned against a partition and tried not to look like a masher. She came out shortly, looking and smelling nice.

I said, "Ms. Barrington."

She started to back away, then decided a rapist wouldn't be likely to

know her name. "Yes?"

"My name's John Northlake. I'm a private investigator. Harold hired me."

She said, "Oh," flatly.

"He's worried about you. If you want to have a fling, that's up to you. But how about talking to the guy, let him know you're okay?"

Something, I thought it was a trapped look, briefly narrowed her eyes. "Harold's a pain."

I shrugged. "Could be. But he loves you and he's concerned. Hell, he's the man you were going to marry not so long ago."

She sighed and dropped her eyes.

"Look, you do whatever you think best. My part's over. Harold is waiting in the parking lot right now. I'll let him know you're alive and well. Or you can tell him yourself."

"All right, Mr. Northlake. You're very convincing. I'll see him for a moment."

"Don't tell your friend. He's been known to break a few *haole* faces. We can slip out the back."

I GUIDED HER THROUGH THE REAR EXIT AND DOWN A narrow alley bounded by hurricane fence to the lot on Beachwalk. It was turning dark already. A Kona wind had come up, rattling the palm fronds, carrying the acrid odor of volcanic ash from the Big Island. Native Hawaiians consider it a malevolent wind, not unlike the Santa Ana in Southern California.

Harold Kramer was sitting glumly in the Cutlass. He brightened up as we approached. "Julie!"

I veered toward a scraggly palm at the edge of the lot and lit a cigarette. Harold jumped out of the car and embraced her. She endured it stiffly. She was a good-looking kid, especially in that off-the-shoulder white blouse and black satin skirt slit from here to the north shore.

A very bad mistake, as it turned out. Too late I sensed that someone was behind me. I started to turn, remembering the big beachboy.

A hand that felt like a two-by-four thudded across the back of my neck. I went down like clothes falling off a hanger. The same hand grabbed my shirt-front, hauled me up and slammed me against the trunk of the tree. Its counterpart, I saw dimly, held a snub-nosed .38.

I got my head up and was face to face with a hard-looking, crooked-nosed character in an awful orange and green aloha shirt. It wasn't Julie's boyfriend, but I recognized that nose. I'd broken it, a long time ago. His hair was cropped so short he was either a Marine drill

instructor or fresh out of prison. Guess which.

"Greetings, Northlake," he said cheerily, frisking me hard, but I'd left my rig at the office.

"Hello, Jeremy. Parole's getting easier to make every year."

He laughed harshly. "No way. I busted Halawa Jail Thursday morning. You should read the papers."

"Yeah," I said. My mouth was dry, my eyes wouldn't focus, and my neck hurt.

Jeremy Sherman was a three-time loser, originally a runner for the mob who had aspired to grander things—like murder. He'd finally made it, three years ago. Moonlighting for the D.A.'s office during a lean period, I'd gathered most of the evidence that sent him up for thirty years. I hadn't forgotten the part I'd played in putting the arm on him, which had resulted in his badly-set nose. Neither, apparently, had he.

About then Harold and Julie saw what was going on and came running over. "Get away!" I croaked. Too late.

Sherman snarled and swung the gun on them. "All right, you two. Over here. Right next to the peeper."

"What's—what's going on?" Harold stammered. Julie's hand flew to her mouth.

"Get over here!" Sherman gestured savagely. "Move!"

They did, slowly and reluctantly. Julie's arm pressed mine and I felt her shiver violently. I was watching Sherman and saw the lust boil up into his eyes as they devoured her—a need so intense you'd have to spend a couple of womanless years in prison to comprehend it. It might, I thought, just might be the key to a way out of this mess. But not now.

"Let them go, Jeremy," I said uselessly. "They're not involved in this."

"They are now. What's your name, honey?"

"Julie. Julie Barington. Please. What—?"

"Shut up. You, wimp?"

Harold glared at him. "Harold Kramer. What do you think you're doing?"

Sherman grinned. "Simple. Northlake and me are old pals. We're all gonna go somewhere quiet for a little chat. Then I'm gonna waste him."

He said it matter-of-factly, like you'd talk about having a drink. I was sweating and cold at the same time. Julie and Harold stared at him in disbelief. People like this didn't exist in their ordered world.

"Okay, let's go. You and Harold here first, Northlake. We go over

and get into your car, real casual. No tricks or Julie baby gets nasty red stuff all over her pretty blouse."

He slipped the gun under his shirt and put his left arm around the girl's waist, pulling her close. He flashed a short-bladed pen-knife for me to see.

We trudged over to the Cutlass. A few people were in the lot. Nobody paid us any attention. Sherman motioned me under the wheel, Harold next to me. He crawled in back with Julie and shoved the chill barrel of the .38 against my neck.

"Drive."

"Where to?"

"Down Kalakaua."

I toolled slowly along the main drag through Waikiki. It was choked as usual with throngs of tourists. There was practically a cop on every corner. They might as well have been on the moon.

Harold sat silently beside me, so stiff I was afraid he might tip over on the corners. Once I sneaked a glance in the rearview mirror to see if Sherman was messing up Julie—and got a surprise. He was ignoring her and sat hunched over, face twisted, obviously fighting a severe stomach pain. He saw me watching him and ground the gun barrel against my second vertebra.

"Eyes on the road, chum. Nowhere else."

FOLLOWING HIS DIRECTIONS, I TURNED ONTO THE FORT Ruger military reservation and up the two-lane blacktop road that circles Diamond Head. I knew what he had in mind now and wasn't surprised when he ordered me to turn into the first tunnel. It's totally deserted inside the big crater at night; a perfect place for a murder—or three.

I edged the car around a series of black and white wooden barriers that warned CIVIL DEFENSE PERSONNEL ONLY and entered. The headlights punched through the total darkness of the tunnel and onto the floor of the crater. It's pretty bare in the daytime; it was stark by moonlight. A few wild shrubs and an occasional clump of hibiscus appeared as shapeless masses, breaking the rolling expanse of grassy bowl. I drove across to the far, ocean side under the Kuilei Cliffs before Sherman barked an order to stop. I killed the lights and motor.

He turned the gun on Julie while Harold and I climbed out. Then, grabbing a handful of her hair, he followed her out of the back seat and lined us up against the driver's side of the car, our backs to him.

My heart was thudding like a runaway metronome as I weighed the chances. Not good. A big three-quarter moon was rising over the east

rim without a cloud in sight. No way for him to miss if I tried something. The wind was muted here in the crater. Harold and Julie stood like they were in a trance. They probably thought this was all a TV drama and were waiting for the commercial break.

"I'm sorry you kids got involved in this," I said, just to remind them they were in trouble too.

"Stow it," Sherman grunted. "Okay, turn around slow, all of you."

We turned. The gun he held wasn't very steady. But then we weren't very far away either.

"How did you find me?" I asked—anything to keep him talking, delay the inevitable.

"Your answering service. They obligingly gave me a list of the places where you might be reached this evening. Simple, huh?"

I remembered now. I'd been expecting a call from Sammy Loo, an insurance adjustor I was doing some trace work for on stolen cars up at Makaha. So I'd left my probable whereabouts with the service when Harold and I left the office.

Harold spoke up in a voice surprisingly firm. "Do you intend to kill us all?"

"Just calm down, sonny," Sherman said, enjoying the situation. "It's square-up time for me and this punk. But you owe me more than three years now, Northlake; you owe me a life."

"What the hell?" I said. "I was turning a dollar. It happened to be my job at the time. If it hadn't been me, somebody else would have got the stuff that sent you up."

"Sure. Just scratching for a buck. Then how come when Willie Manoa offered you five grand for the file you were gonna turn over to the D.A., you wouldn't talk to him?"

I shrugged. "Scruples, Jeremy. Professional ethics."

IT WASN'T WHAT HE WANTED TO HEAR. HE BACKHANDED me across the mouth. I tasted blood. Suddenly the flash of pain crossed his face again and he clutched at his middle.

"Smart-mouth peeper. The last two good years of my life I spent inside that stinking prison because you won't take a bribe. No! Stay back. I hurt, but not that bad." His voice was husky, strained. "You know why I hurt? The big C, that's why. My insides are full of it and it hurts like hell 'cause I haven't had any dope since yesterday. I'm dying, Northlake, and I wasted my good time because of you. That's why I'm gonna kill you. One bullet, right through the guts, so you get a little taste of what I'm carrying. Then I'm gonna party like nobody's ever seen with the time I got left. Yeah, maybe they'll catch me. So what?"

I'll never live to stand trial."

He was talking himself mad. He hit me again, this time slapping me above the left ear with the pistol. I fell back against the car, between Harold and Julie. I understood now just how crazy, how deadly he was. He had nothing to lose.

He came in, belting me again, but carefully so I couldn't grapple with him. I slid along the fender and grabbed at the girl for support. She yelped and started to shake. With my chin on her shoulder, my lips nearly against her ear, I murmured, "Work on him!"

I wasn't even sure she heard me until I pulled away and saw the look in her eyes. Christ! Was she going to balk? Surely a girl who an hour ago had been hunting for kicks with a beachboy didn't believe in that fate worse than death stuff.

"How does it feel, Northlake? For a young, healthy stud like you to know your time is up? Scary, ain't it? You're closer than I am now."

He slugged me again, hard, and I felt my control start to go. Which was exactly what Sherman wanted. He would goad me until I couldn't restrain myself anymore. When I went for him I was dead. It wouldn't be long.

Then Julie came to life.

"Please, mister." Her voice started out throaty and ended up cracking, but it got his attention. "I don't want to die. You're not going to hurt me, are you?"

She stepped away from the car, long legs flashing in the moonlight. She was a knockout, all right; even at a time like this my hormones acknowledged that. I only hoped when Sherman got her message he wouldn't blast Harold and me immediately to get to her.

"You've got a good reason for a grudge, I guess," she continued, "but it doesn't include me. We could work something out, couldn't we?"

It was crude, Lord knows, but you've got to remember Sherman had been locked up. He probably hadn't had many proposals from good-looking women lately. Who has? He couldn't keep his eyes off her.

"Come here, sweetie," he said hoarsely.

That was too much for Harold. "Keep your hands off her!" he yelled and started forward.

Sherman clubbed him savagely, the gun ringing off the kid's skull with a sickening *thwock*. He went down like a maledeted steer, blood spraying where the sight had gashed his head. Julie screamed. But Sherman's attention was off me for a split second. It was now or never.

WISHING I HAD SPENT MORE TIME ON KARATE LESSONS,

I threw out my right foot as quick and hard as I could. The toe of my shoe caught him in his already tender mid-section. It was like kicking a board. Pain shot up my leg. We both grunted and he reeled backwards into the brush-choked ditch. I limped after him but a flash and the deadly whine of a bullet changed my mind. He had managed to hang onto the gun.

“Come on!” I yelled, grabbing Julie’s arm, and we dove for the other side of the car. Which was about as much protection as burying our heads in the sand. He would be after us in a second.

I looked around, saw that the ground sloped up from this side of the road to the base of the cliffs. There were quite a few patches of shadow near them.

“Stay low,” I ordered, “and run like hell.”

I CAUGHT HER HAND AND WE SPRINTED OUT OF THERE. My leg got better in a hurry. I dragged her along a zig-zag route, heading for the few yards of dense shadows under the cliffs’ overhang. The gun cracked twice more, but Sherman must have been firing wildly; I didn’t hear any slugs in our vicinity. The shots echoed and reechoed across the empty crater until they sounded like a fusillade.

We reached the line where the moonlight ended and plunged into the darkness like it was an olympic pool on a hot day. There were a lot of bushes up against the base of the cliffs. We scrambled behind some of them and peered back down toward the car. Sherman was standing at the side of the road, doubled over, gun in one hand while the other held his stomach.

“Harold!” she cried. We could see him lying there near the left front wheel. “Is he . . . ?”

“I don’t know. Sherman hit him pretty hard. Get rid of that blouse.”

“What?”

“Take it off,” I snapped. “That material shows up like a beacon in this light.” An idea hit me. “We might be able to use it to lay a little trap for our bloodthirsty friend.”

“I dreamed I was being chased by a mad killer in my Maidenform bra,” Julie grumbled, shucking the blouse. I grinned. She was a pretty tough kid after all.

Taking the garment from her, I rebuttoned it and stretched it over some shrubs, trying to make the limp cloth appear like there was somebody inside it. The result wasn’t likely to fool anyone inside ten yards; maybe that would be enough.

Belatedly I slipped off my shirt—dark blue, if you were

wondering—and gave it to Julie. She was nearly as pale as the blouse. I had been working on my tan for five years, so I blended fairly well.

"Keep your hair over your face as much as possible," I said, "and let's move down this way a little."

Sherman was scanning the slope intently. I hoped he had seen where we went into the shadows and would zero in on that spot. We belly-crawled about twenty yards to the right, stopping behind a clump of frangipani. Sherman crossed the ditch and took a couple of steps up the incline, bearing toward our original position.

I put my mouth close to Julie's ear. "Listen now. With any luck he'll see the blouse and head for it. If he does I'm going after him. As soon as you see me move, run for the car. The keys are still in it. No matter what happens, get the hell out of here."

"But Harold—"

"Harold may be dead," I interrupted her. "Either way you've got to get out. There's a CB under the dash. Flip it to channel 9 and call the cops—but not till you're outside the crater!"

She bit her lip but nodded understanding. I wriggled away from her, moving back toward where the blouse was. I stopped a little to the left and slightly below the patch of white. And waited. I was sweating like a blacksmith, mouth so dry I couldn't swallow.

IT WAS QUIETER THAN A GRAVEYARD. HARD TO BELIEVE that a few hundred yards away cars were roaring over heavily traveled streets and thousands of people were going about their nightly business.

Sherman took several more shambling steps and paused. His eyes swept the area once, twice. Look, you dummy! See the blouse! What are you, blind?

Then he saw it. He stared a few long seconds, ignored it and brought the gun up. I felt my heart constrict. He hadn't bought it. Worse, he was going to pump a couple of rounds into the brush to flush us out. That damned gun was pointed straight at me, although I wasn't certain he had seen me.

"*Don't shoot!*" Julie stood up in plain sight.

I knew she was trying to buy me a few precious seconds, but Sherman wasn't having any. She was no threat. He could have blown her away right then, but I think he still had designs on that beautiful body. He continued to glare directly at my hiding place over the leveled gun.

I was ready to break cover and die with my boots on when Julie gave a little gasp. Behind Sherman, lurching around drunkenly, his face a mask of blood, was Harold. I would have given odds he was dead or close to it.

Sherman fired. Dirt flew alongside my left knee. The shot apparently caught Harold's attention. In agonizing slow motion he staggered across the ditch and literally draped himself over Sherman's back. He was too weak to do more than distract the convict, but it was enough.

I yelled like a wild Comanche and plunged down the slope. Sherman had time for one more shot. I felt the heat from the bullet sear my cheek, it was that close. Then I hit the struggling pair, my shoulder driving into Sherman's belly so hard I lifted them both off the ground.

He clubbed me once on the back with the gun before I tore it away from him, hurling it into the bushes. I waded into him with all the anger and fear of the evening pushing the adrenalin through my system. I might have killed him then if Julie hadn't rushed up and pulled me away. Sherman collapsed like a rag doll.

I stood there panting and trembling while she knelt beside Harold and took his bloody head gently in her hands.

"Oh, Harold! Darling! Are you all right?" He gave her a silly grin.

When I caught my breath I bent down to check his eyes and pulse. He looked better than I felt. He apparently had a head like a brick.

I moved over to Sherman. He was flat on his back, not breathing very well. I loosened his belt and found another one under it, flat and wide and hard. A money belt. That was what I had kicked. I opened one of the pouches. Half a dozen diamonds winked up at me, blue-white in the moonlight.

Behind me, Julie sniffed, made a little choking noise, then suddenly began to giggle. "What time is it?"

I looked at my watch. "Almost eight-thirty. Why?"

"My . . . friend. I left him sitting at our table to go to the ladies room over an hour ago. What do you suppose he's thinking right now?"

Harold smiled. I chuckled. Relief hit us like a stiff belt of hundred-proof and the crater echoed with our laughter. Well, it's an ill wind that blows no good, right? It looked like Sherman's revenge play might end up cementing a shaky relationship. And Cassie Moore had mentioned that the diamond merchants were offering a sizeable reward for the return of their goods.

I walked over to the car, broke channel 9 on the CB and told the HPD dispatcher where to find us. Julie was cradling Harold's head and telling him how sorry she was, that it would never happen again. I hoped he believed her.

I did.



Father Dooley forgave sinners by handing out verbal penances, but Theodore had a better plan—blackmail!

Confession

by JAMES KRAMER

“FILTHY RICH PARISHIONERS!” EXPLODED FATHER Dooley.

“Are they?” asked Phil Theodore, who had always found clergymen invaluablely informative. Theodore was suddenly glad he had come north; filthy rich parishioners held a certain fascination for him. Dooley’s words were warming the lingering chill of the winter night. He motioned to the bartender for a refill.

“When I got into this racket,” Dooley said, pausing to thank Theodore and the bartender as his glass was filled, “When I got into this racket I was filled with all kinds of ideas. Great ideas. But the church bureaucracy—don’t think there isn’t one—the church bureaucracy foiled me at every step.”

Dooley picked up his glass and took a drink, showing no sign of continuing his narrative. “At every step?” Theodore prodded.

“Until I came here,” Dooley said. “Then it seemed I had carte blanche to implement my ideas. But I was thwarted again.”

“By the church bureaucracy?”

Dooley glared at him, and for a moment Theodore feared he might not continue. But his expression softened. "No. I was thwarted by the filthy rich parishioners. They have so much potential for doing good, if only because of their wealth, but they squander that potential. They're so busy trying to gain ground on one another that they forget the rest of humanity. They throw away money on whims."

"Surely not!"

"Rug deodorant?"

Theodore seemed impressed by this point. "They don't admit that in the confessional, do they?"

"No. It would never occur to them as being wrong or in any way wasteful." Dooley laughed. "If it did, they'd confess to it. My confessional is largely populated by women, and lately they seem to be vying with one another for honors of some sort."

"Disgusting!"

"I get tired of it. I never know who's lying, who's truly repentant, who's truly troubled. So—God help me—I just hand out arbitrary penances: didn't go to Mass, two Hail Marys and three Our Fathers; coveted someone, three Hail Marys and five Our Fathers. Funny they never admit to coveting *things*, although that is the worst of their collective crimes."

Theodore looked at him in amazement, thinking what a wealth (ah, *that was a good one*) of information could be gathered here.

"Oh, I know each case is unique, and the penance should suit the particulars," Dooley continued, "but it's impossible! It's not as if God whispers in my ear, 'I know it's only one curse, but for her that is exceptional: ten Hail Marys and fifteen Our Fathers.'"

Theodore laughed at Dooley's impression of God.

"Well, it's true," said Dooley, laughing along. "Adultery is my biggie: ten of each. As far as I can tell, parishioners of both sexes seem to feel it's worth it." They both laughed again.

"That's your greatest punishment then?" Theodore asked.

Dooley's countenance suddenly straightened. He shrugged. "Well, I've had a couple of *real* biggies" His voice drifted off.

Theodore could see that Dooley was uncomfortable, so he steered the conversation back toward the filthy rich parishioners and their less objectionable habits. They talked for quite a while about Christian morality and duty, a subject in which Theodore was surprisingly well-versed, and they traded anecdotes.

"Next year I'll get back to a parish of real people," Dooley said. "But it's like waiting out a prison term."

"You won't mind if I frequent the church then?" asked Theodore.

"Believe me, just seeing you there will be a relief," Dooley said.

Their conversation meandered on until the bartender announced closing. Rising, they engaged in a ritual of stretching. It occurred to Father Dooley that kneeling, standing and sitting in Mass had a practical use.

"Nice talking to you, Father," Theodore said.

"Thank you. I'm afraid I don't even know your name."

"Phil Theodore. Call me Phil."

"Thank you, Phil. I hardly expected a reawakening of my faith when I came here tonight. It's sad, but I can't speak honestly about Christianity in my own parish anymore. An outsider like you is a godsend." He smiled. "A god-send. Funny, that phrase just entered my mind."

Theodore smiled and raised his hand.

Dooley grasped it. "I hope to see you in church then."

"Count on it, Father."

IT WAS TEN O'CLOCK ON A THURSDAY MORNING. Theodore paused outside the church grounds, stuffing his hat and gloves into the interior pockets of his coat. Most of the area natives were dressed in sweaters or light coats, and Theodore did not want to be noticed as significantly less accustomed to the cold than they were. He trotted to the church door, entered and crossed to the rearmost pews. He knelt and was chagrined to find that his legs were not yet immune to the discomfort of that act.

He brought a thick paperback out from his coat pocket. Reading had helped him through the last two weeks of this waiting game, after the freshness of his new setting and the study of characters had lasted through the first week. Now he had been reduced to reading the cheapest sensationalism in order to keep discomfort and boredom from overwhelming him.

He glanced at the ladies waiting to enter the confessional. If they could see what he was reading inside the cover he had ripped off a hotel Bible, wouldn't they be outraged! Come to think of it, they might be outraged at the real thing! The thought soothed him only for a moment. He felt that if he could endure another week of this, it would be a testament to his self-control.

There was one promising woman today, barring late arrivals. She had been third in line, a long, lovely woman who glanced nervously toward the church entrances whenever someone came or left. Had she committed the "biggie"? Theodore wondered. He tried dipping into his book, but his attention continually wandered back to the woman.

Considering the superfluity of money suggested by her outfit, the prospects were intoxicating.

When she left the confessional, Theodore rose and strolled down the center aisle. Trying to be quick while appearing nonchalant, he slid into the pew directly behind the one she had chosen, keeping a comfortable distance between himself and her. She spoke her Hail Marys loud enough for him to hear, a relief to Theodore, who had spent many such sessions vainly rotating his head, trying to find an angle that would make audible his target's whisperings.

She sprinted through the first four or five prayers, but by number eight she was dragging considerably. Theodore himself was praying, praying that the woman would say two more Hail Marys so he could be sure. When she stopped after ten and began the Our Fathers, Theodore was certain that he had a live prospect. She slowed down sooner on the Our Fathers, and after she managed to scrape the first six from her weary vocal chords, Theodore made the sign of the cross and left. If she quit now, it would be due to carelessness or boredom.

When her penance was done, she exited toward the front of the church. Theodore was waiting outside the back entrance, past which she would have to drive when leaving the parking lot. She soon drove by in a Mercedes Benz.

Theodore went inside and confessed to a few random sins, noticing that Father Dooley seemed unusually preoccupied.

AT QUARTER TO TEN ON SUNDAY MORNING, THEODORE sat in a rented car parked along the main road outside the church. From his vantage, he could see any car entering the church parking lot. He was getting accustomed to the spot, having been there from four-thirty to five-thirty and from six-thirty to seven-thirty Saturday evening, looking for the Mercedes.

He had hoped she would come that evening, since it would have saved him a day's car rental, but in his imagined scheme of things she was definitely a Sunday churchgoer. People went to church on Saturday evening if they were bored, or if their Sunday mornings were busy. Theodore imagined that she would be the life of the party on Saturdays and would reserve Sunday for church. Her wealth was proof enough to him that she was married, and she most likely had a small family, maybe two children. They were under ten years old. More children might be in her future, but she would want to maintain some independence, with which she wouldn't do much.

She wouldn't be an eight o'clock churchgoer because of her Saturday nights (though Theodore had been waiting since seven-thirty to make

sure), and she wouldn't go at twelve o'clock because that Mass carried the stigma of laziness. Ten o'clock it would be, he decided, and he amused himself by creating scenarios opposed to the one he had so fully fleshed out.

Just before ten, the Mercedes came into view and turned into the parking lot. Theodore smiled, at last relieved of the tedium of waiting and watching and of the building doubts as to whether he would see the woman or the car again. Relaxing, he took out a book and began to read. The hour passed quickly.

When people began to leave Mass, Theodore maneuvered his car to a spot from which he could easily merge into the flow of traffic from the parking lot. When the Mercedes pulled out, he eased in a few cars behind, amused by the competitive antics of the parishioners, who were apparently blessed due to qualities other than meekness. He followed at a reasonable distance, confident of his anonymity, as the Mercedes weaved its way into a progressively quieter community and finally turned into a driveway.

Theodore slowed down as he passed, reading the name Haskell on the mailbox. 13031 Lower Goose Neck Rd. was the address.

He returned the car to the rental agency, paid his bill and took a taxi home. He was boarding in the basement of an old couple's home, an arrangement made for him by Father Dooley after Theodore politely declined Dooley's offer to stay with him.

There remained the phrasing of the letter. "If you don't want you-know-who to know you-know-what . . ." was lacking in the genteel subtlety that would most powerfully affect a woman like Mrs. Haskell. On the whole, Theodore decided, it would be wise to remind her that gold was still a good investment.

MRS. HASKELL ENTERED THE SHOPPING MALL AT EXACTLY one o'clock, having come in a taxi as instructed. She came showily dressed, as Theodore had requested, in a magnificent white fur coat and shawl with a matching beret-style hat and a mid-length purple velvet dress. She wore high-heeled shoes and leather gloves, carrying in one hand a small paper bag.

She took a seat at the end of one of the benches as Theodore wandered into a health food store. The mall was thick with people, and she could have no way of knowing which of the fifty or so men in that lane (or the many women, for that matter) had written the note. She put the bag on the ground, pushing it far enough beneath the bench so that no good samaritan would try to return it when she left. After two minutes of glancing about, she rose and returned to the taxi.

Theodore made sure she got in and was driven off. He could have taken more precautions, but he was confident that Mrs. Haskell would want the whole event to end as quietly and painlessly as possible. He walked to the bench and sat down in the spot she had vacated. Seconds later he left with the bag, heading across the mall to the exit opposite.

Before stepping out into the first major snowfall of the year, he examined the contents of the bag. He smiled appreciatively. Inside were five St. Gauden's twenty-dollar gold pieces, worth about six hundred dollars apiece at the previous day's market price. Called by many numismatists the most beautiful of all United States coins, they were impossible to forge and could easily be converted into cash. Each coin was encased snugly in a plastic housing. Theodore dropped them back into the bag, buttoned his coat, tossed his scarf around his neck, put on his hat and gloves, and walked out the door into a suffocating gust of wind and snow.

He had about three thousand tax-free dollars to show for five weeks of work, and there was no reason that Mrs. Haskell might not, at some future date, want to invest even more of her money. As far as anyone else was concerned, she had the coins tucked away in her safety deposit box. Theodore laughed. It had been so easy.

HE HAD PARKED HIS CAR, ANOTHER RENTAL, IN THE middle of the crowded lot. All that remained was to return it to the airport and depart for warmer weather. As he approached his car he heard a voice behind him. "Excuse me."

He looked back and saw a gorgeous girl of about twenty, he guessed, dressed in sneakers, jeans, a tight-fitting turtleneck under a partially-buttoned-down jacket, a stocking cap and a pair of oversized mittens. "My car doesn't seem to be starting. Could you give me a jump?" she asked. "I've got cables."

"If you've got the cables, I've got the connections," he joked. It didn't make a lot of sense, but they both laughed. In fact, the idea of jumping a car evoked images of battery acid spattering on his face. But he was under the influence of success, and even spending one more night in the area was suddenly not out of the question. Affairs had had more modest beginnings.

"My car is a few rows down," she said.

"Hop in, then," he said, climbing into the driver's seat and reaching across to unlock her door. Snow was still falling, and it covered the windows. He put the key in the ignition as she climbed in. Before he could start the car she said, "Hold it," and he turned to see a small pistol, a Maverick Derringer, in her hands. There was a shock of

recognition, as the girl of twenty became the woman of thirty.

"Mrs. Haskell," he said, in the manner of a warm greeting. She must have hurriedly exchanged hats, gloves and shoes in the cab. Her down jacket had been under the lavish coat she had been wearing, and the jeans had been rolled up beneath the skirt. "Quite a disguise," he added nervously. "How did you find me?" He was playing for enough time to decide on a reasonable proposal.

"Transmitting chips glued into the coin housings," she said. He nodded appreciatively. Who said suburban housewives didn't have moxie? "You should have taken better precautions with a murderer."

Murderess?

"By the way," she added, "it's *Miss* Haskell, not *Mrs.*"

He had time to notice that she wore no wedding ring before the two .45 bullets slammed into his chest, each fired from its own barrel. The blood was contained by Theodore's excessive clothing. Miss Haskell pulled him toward her to ensure that he didn't slump down on the horn. She grabbed the bag of coins, reached across and locked Theodore's door and then opened her own, peering out guardedly. Seeing no one, she slipped out of the car and locked her door. Only by staring into one of the side windows could it be detected that anything was amiss, and the snow would shortly cover them again.

Miss Haskell crossed through the mall and picked up a second package she had left behind: a fur coat and shawl, skirt, high-heeled shoes, hat and gloves. She walked out to the Mercedes she had driven there earlier and went home.

Snow continued to fall.

FATHER DOOLEY WAS NEVER COMFORTABLE IN THE confessional when the screen was drawn; he found that hearing confessions face to face produced undue tension in his social life. Hearing the first squeak of the screen being opened had become especially nerve-wracking for Dooley since Miss Haskell's visit two weeks earlier. When he saw that she was back, he was visibly shaken.

"Hi, Dad," she said, smiling.

He had never been sure if she used the confessional solely to mock his religion or if there was a search for truth going on somewhere inside. He suspected that she felt a need to speak to someone, but that she was too proud to exhibit anything but scorn to whomever would listen.

"I've been a bad girl again," she said. "I want to find Christ, Dad, but there was a man who wouldn't let me do it. You see, I had to be bad to be good later."

Dooley was torn between pity and hatred. "Christ taught us to

always do right and to suffer the consequences."

"Then why did He send the snow?"

Dooley was taken aback. "The snow?"

"It was like a sign to go ahead. It made everything so easy."

Dooley looked at her incredulously. "Miss Haskell, it snowed over a seven-state area last weekend. Do you really believe that God went to all that trouble to make it easier for you to kill a man?"

She looked back at him blankly. "But he could have taken my money, Dad! Don't you see—the money that could be turned to good. He wanted to strip me of my ability to do good."

Dooley lowered his head. Was this the preaching he had visited upon his parish—to do good deeds with money? Because of the affluence of the community had he stressed the ability to do good with money over the ability to do good *simply by doing good?*

"Good is fully dependent on you, Miss Haskell. Not on your clothes, not on your material possessions, not on your money. On *you*."

"Okay, Dad. I get the point. I have another confession to make. Last time, you gave me twenty-five Hail Marys and twenty-five Our Fathers and told me to think carefully about what they meant."

"Yes." Dooley was barely able to voice the word, so angry was he at himself. His best advice to a murderer—beyond advising her to turn herself in to the police, at which suggestion she had been outraged—had been to reel off fifty prayers.

"I got bored," Miss Haskell said. "I only made it through ten of each."

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

James Kramer (*Confession*) writes:

I am a twenty-five-year-old, single, previously unpublished English major living in Dellwood, Minnesota, a suburb of St. Paul. For the last three years I have worked as a financial proofreader; prior to that I worked summers as an assistant tennis pro. I spend a great deal of my spare time reading, but I still enjoy playing tennis (and many other sports) and competing in chess and Scrabble tournaments. I'm also learning to play the piano. stiff competition

It wasn't so much the idea of dying that frightened him, but the waiting. The wondering how and when it might happen!

Mama's Boy

by KATHLEEN KEY

LEONARD KRANTZ PRESSED HIS NOSE AGAINST THE RAIN-streaked, waiting room window and strained to see the parking lot below. It was typical, he thought, that the sun would refuse to shine on this particular day. It seemed fitting to him that it should be a gray, dismal day to match his morose mood. Today was a dying kind of day.

Not a day passed, lately, that Leonard didn't think of death—never seriously—merely a brief thought coming and going like a melancholy sigh. But today was different. Leonard knew, as he glanced around the pristine waiting room that something very real and sinister was in progress. He didn't know when it would end, but he knew it had begun. The stage had been set early that morning.

Leonard had slept fitfully all night. He had dreamed and struggled and awakened in the middle of the night tangled in sweat-drenched sheets. The pounding of his heart had awakened him, and when he saw how wet he was with perspiration, he recalled his mother's warnings to him as a child: "*Beware of night sweats, Lenny. Night sweats are death sweats.*"

That morning he had managed to drag himself from bed and into the bathroom to wash for breakfast. As he steadied himself on the sink and raised his face to the mirror, he became puzzled. He turned his head away and then back again, quickly. He didn't know who was in the mirror, but it wasn't he. The face had a strange uneven look like the face of the insane in an asylum ink sketch. Each half of the face looked like a separate person, with the two halves strangers to each other. There was a marked difference in the size of the eyes—one was bright and clear, and the other dull and dumb. One cheekbone was noticeably

higher than the other, and likewise, one ear sagged lower than its mate. Lenny turned his head from side to side and there it was again. The left profile was really quite handsome, but the right profile was frighteningly grotesque. Then, as Leonard gazed full-face into the glass, the face staring back was so hideous that he grasped the mirror and jerked, opening the medicine chest and shoving the monster from his sight. He opened his mouth to scream, but was mute. He leaned his face over the sink and vomited.

After some time, Leonard pulled himself together and splashed cold water on his face. As he watched the little bits of vomit swirling down the drain, he heard a little insane chuckle that worried him even more than the insane face in the mirror.

When Leonard arrived downstairs for breakfast, his wife Sarah smiled at him. He knew she was only pretending to be cheerful. He could tell when people were acting.

His mama had told him, "*Live as though I'm looking over your shoulder, because I'll always know what you're doing.*" Leonard had this same talent. He always knew what people were thinking and doing.

"Happy birthday, hon," Sarah said, pouring his coffee and orange juice. "How do you want to celebrate today?"

"Celebrate?" Leonard answered, frowning, "Do you have any idea what birthday this is?"

"Sure, you're thirty-five years young today."

Leonard squinted his eyes in pain and looked Sarah squarely in the eyes, "Ever since I was a kid, I've thought I'd die before I reached the age of thirty-five—and here it is. My time's run out, Sarah."

"You've told me this story a million times, Len. It still fails to impress me." Sarah laughed, then walked over to Leonard and ruffled his hair.

Leonard smiled, "Did anyone ever tell you you have the most haunting laugh in the world? Still, Sarah, I can feel death all around me lately. It's following me around."

"Darling, if you were given a quarter for every kid who truly believed he'd never live to be thirty-five, you'd be a very wealthy old geezer someday."

"I know you think I'm only being dramatic, but I've been having unbelievable headaches—and you know what? When I was upstairs just now I vomited. I have all the symptoms of a brain tumor, and I really don't find that rather amusing."

"You have all the symptoms of the flu, too, Sweetpea. I think you'll feel much better after you see Dr. Jaeger this afternoon."

Leonard held his head with one hand and tipped his glass of juice

with the other, "I hate Dr. Jaeger. I don't need a shrink. I'm not insane; I'm dying."

NEVERTHELESS, LEONARD WAS AT THIS VERY MOMENT waiting to be ushered into Dr. Jaeger's office. He was concentrating very hard on breathing. His head still hurt, his hands tingled, and he had the distinct and familiar feeling of panic. He shifted his position in his chair. He wondered about the reasoning behind having all the little hard, orange chairs connected together like they were. They looked like shiny Indian beads. He thought they were probably connected to keep some irate patient from picking one up and hurling it at the stonewashed receptionist. She was going busily about her filing. She speedily went from desk to filing cabinet, without ever leaving her chair, like a wheelchair marathoner—proving, Leonard supposed, that wheels were more efficient than legs. As if by some mystic cue, the receptionist rose from her chair and walked toward Leonard.

"Mr. Krantz, Dr. Jaeger will see you now. Go right on in."

Leonard stood and slowly made his way toward the door. He was in no hurry to face the doctor, but knew he might as well get it over with. As his mama would have said, "*Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.*" So very timidly, Leonard walked into the office.

There sat Dr. Jaeger behind his monumental oaken desk. Great things could be expected from a man who owned a desk like that. Leonard knew his mama would have been proud to see *him* sitting behind a desk of that magnitude. Suddenly his tiny plywood desk at home was little more than another symbol of his failure.

Leonard hated this office. He had never seen so many shades of blue in his life, and they were all in one room. Someone must have told Dr. Jaeger that blue was a tranquil color, and Dr. Jaeger in turn had tried to put the entire world to sleep. Three of the four walls were a sick baby blue. The fourth wall held a huge mural of waves rushing against a rocky shoreline: more tranquility. The ceiling of the office was a head-splitting metallic blue. Leonard wondered how many insane people had run screaming from this very office after lying on the couch and gazing up into that horrible ceiling. Behind Dr. Jaeger's desk there was a macrame plant hanger of aqua-blue, hanging like a psychotic suicide victim. Leonard guessed there was no such thing as blue ferns, for the fern was green. He moved to the blue crushed-velvet chair and sat facing Dr. Jaeger.

"And so, Mr. Krantz, how has your day been thus far?"

"My what?" he answered, still thinking about the fern.

"I asked you how you've been, Mr. Krantz?"

Leonard wanted to ask him if he knew that blue was another word for depressed, and that by having so much blue in his office, he was probably responsible for a lot of fairly normal people leaving his office, going home, and blowing their brains out. "I've been doing real great, Doc. I got my fears under control now. There's nowhere for me to go now but up. I just got a feeling that I'm in line for a real change of luck."

Dr. Jaeger sat nodding and tapping his pencil on the desk top. God, how Leonard hated that. It made him want to yell . . . tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . Leonard looked away from the desk, and saw the waves from the mural crashing down toward him . . . tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . He couldn't breathe. He couldn't move . . . he was drowning in a sea of blue.

"So Mr. Krantz . . . today is your birthday, yes?"

"Yeh, Doc, that's right. I'm thirty-five today. Gettin' to be an old guy, huh?" Leonard could feel his headache worsening.

"You had expressed some fear earlier this month about this particular birthday, had you not?"

"Gee, Doc," Leonard said nervously, "I thought I told you, I got all that stuff under control. I'm not as neurotic as you seem to think."

"So how have you celebrated number thirty-five so far, Leonard. What exactly have you done today?"

"Well, I haven't done too much, Doc. My wife and I went out to lunch right before I came over here. It was sort of a celebration I guess."

Leonard had picked Sarah up for lunch and when they started downtown, he had been met with a gagging stench. He had glanced around the liver-brown interior of his new car. There had been an overpowering smell of warm, sweet, sticky blood. It was like fresh blood on a hot day.

"What's that awful smell?" he'd asked Sarah.

Sarah laughed. "All new cars smell like that," she answered.

Leonard had had to open his window and hang his head out the window to clear his head.

"That's wonderful," Dr. Jaeger was saying, "I'm so glad you haven't let memories of your mother's untimely death interfere with your thinking today . . . or your celebrating."

"Oh heavens no, Doc. Sarah and I had a fine lunch. We even had a toast with a very fine white wine."

He and Sarah had sat in the restaurant like two statues. When the wine was poured, Sarah had raised her glass in a birthday toast.

Leonard still couldn't remember the words, but he remembered the wine. It had tasted like fresh gardenias. And even though he had never tasted gardenias before, he knew the smell all too well. The wine had that same funeral taste. He had sat there sipping his funeral wine, toasting pain, tasting grief, drinking in tragedy like an alcoholic angel of death.

"So now, Mr. Krantz, you can see that there is no connection between the fact that this is your thirty-fifth birthday, and the fact that your mother died when she was but thirty-five. You are your own man, with your own life, and yes, even your own death."

"Oh sure, Doc, I'm not as dumb as I look." Leonard chuckled to show that he was not only sane but happy as well.

"Well then, I guess there's nothing more to say. I'll see you next Tuesday, same time. I'll let you get on with your celebration."

LEONARD WALKED FROM THE OFFICE AND THROUGH the waiting room. He walked to the elevator and pushed the button. He wasn't sure what Dr. Jaeger's game was, but he had to be one of the dumbest people Leonard had ever come across. There were just some people in this world, Leonard thought, that could be made to swallow anything.

Leonard took the elevator down to the main floor and walked out into the rain. He began walking the six blocks to his office, and his head began pounding worse than ever. He wished he hadn't let Sarah use his new car this afternoon. That's just the way it was with women, though. Mama had warned him about women when he was only twelve. There were always women just waiting, mama had told him, to take advantage of a nice guy.

Leonard had only walked about a block when his head began to hurt so badly that his eyes felt ready to spring from their sockets. He thought he could feel someone watching him, and as he turned around quickly, he thought he caught sight of his mother in a pretty floral dress out of the corner of his eye. No, that was foolishness. He was sure that everyone in the city could see the mark of death on him. The foul odor of death was in his mouth, and he was careful not to speak to anyone he met.

It wasn't so much the idea of dying that frightened Leonard, but the waiting. The wondering how and when it might happen. It was the tick, tick, ticking away of the minutes and hours that was ripping him apart. Leonard stopped at the curb, rubbed his forehead and then his eyes. He squinted up at the traffic light. It was a misty blur of color. He felt faint. He shouldn't go into the office in this condition. Better to go

home. Leonard stepped off the curb.

"*Lenny!*" His mother's voice.

He looked up to face the voice—and there she was just across the street waiting for him. He slowly began walking toward the gray-haired woman in the floral dress. Suddenly there was a screech of tires and the sound of breaking glass. As Leonard hit the windshield and crashed over the top of the car, he heard his mama's voice once more "*What a good boy, Lenny.*" Then he heard another familiar sound—the sound of angels' laughing.

DR. JAEGER STOOD AT HIS OFFICE WINDOW AND watched an ambulance speed by. As he gazed on the flashing red lights, he had a strange look on his face. There was a knock on his door, and he spoke, "Come in." A young woman wearing a pretty floral dress entered the room, tossed a gray wig on his desk, and joined him at the window. She had a contented smile on her face.

"It's amazing," she said, "what a little slick pavement can do to a person." She pointed to where the red flash was coming.

Dr. Jaeger added, "Not to mention the right drugs in a man's orange juice and wine."

They both laughed.

Dr. Jaeger put his arms lovingly around the pretty woman, "You are not to worry, Sarah. I can testify that your husband was quite suicidal."

"When he saw me," Sarah chuckled, "he came right toward me. Stepped right into the path of that car. It was so perfect—I swear, I had to laugh." She put her hand against the window and wiped away the fog with tiny circular motions. The ambulance had gone from the scene, and the crowd had gone and everything was back to normal. The telephone rang.

"Yes," Dr. Jaeger was saying, "she is here."

"That's impossible; no one knows I'm here," Sarah whispered.

Dr. Jaeger shrugged and handed Sarah the phone. Sarah took it and slowly spoke. "Hello," she said.

The voice on the other end of the line said, "This is Memorial Hospital. We have brought in your husband. He had been in a rather bad accident."

"Oh my God!" Sarah cried, trying to feign her worry. "Is he dead?"

"Oh no . . . no . . ." the voice said, "He was very lucky. But the strangest thing is, he is very agitated and he simply won't cooperate with us until we called you and gave you a message from him."

Sarah's heart pounded. Her mouth was as dry as sawdust. "Yes,"

she said understandingly, "what is the message?"

"Well, it's rather an odd message under the circumstances. He wants you to know that no one in the whole world has a laugh as haunting as your laugh. Does that mean anything to you?"

Sarah dropped the telephone and sobbed wildly. It meant more than anyone could possibly know.

Mike's Mail

WEIRD?

Still enjoying MSMM although some of the stories are a little bit weird! Too much supernatural, sex, foul language, etc., instead of a well-conceived plot. Let's get back to the basic mysteries with the clever twists—like murder most simple! Thank you.

Rev. D.C. Hinshaw

1622 Fordem Ave.

Madison, Wisconsin 53704

I haven't noticed any significant increase in the sexuality of Mike Shayne, although perhaps his relationship with Lucy has gotten more obvious. In the case of Mel Ames' Cathy Carruthers series, I must admit to a certain fun-loving byplay that is evident. Is this going too far? We haven't been inundated with letters of protest, even though the persons with complaints are frequently the most vocal in these matters. I'd like to hear from other readers on this—pro or con. These are the 1980's and the world has gotten somewhat more casual about these things. I don't think we're catering to the young crowd in particular; an entertaining story should appeal to a variety of readers.

As to the weirdness, there are traces of that. About 98% of the stories sent to MSMM are about triangles (two spouses and a lover, not Bermuda), hitmen, private eyes that sound like unintentional parodies, and stories in which the only mystery is why the author wrote the story in the first place. There are probably plenty of those around (and we'll undoubtedly use some in MSMM) but how many of these can you take year after year? To brighten up the issue I'll occasionally run something offbeat. Some readers love it; others hate it.

There are more readers joining and rejoining MSMM than leaving, so we must be doing something right. Let's hear from some of you on this. Write!

It was his deepest fear. The idea horrified him and he sweated as he fantasized the worst things happening. Mutilation! The word contained all the magic of hell for him!

Facing It

by STEVE RASNIC TEM

BILL LAY IN BED EXAMINING THE STRAP, STRETCHING IT lovingly between his two scarred hands: a thick wide band of leather, row upon row of outward-facing fishhooks sewn into its entire length. He'd fixed it himself, taking care to place the hooks so that once the strap was swung they would enter the victim's flesh evenly, all at the same time. He was proud of it.

He touched the fishhooks carefully, letting one or two prick his flesh, bringing a bead of blood that he rubbed into the strap's leather backside. He grinned. He'd seen other guys in the gangs with straps like

this one, but none as good. He'd done an expert job. That's why so many of them had been jealous of him, even Tommy. Always trying to make out something bad about having the strap.

"Bill, I tell you . . . having that strap around could backfire on a fella . . ." Tommy looked scared, his face all pale and eyes bugged out. Bill could feel only contempt for him. Tommy was sick for the strap, craved it; Bill knew. All the guys craved it, just like they craved Bill's good looks and ways with women.

"So how, big man . . . how's it gonna backfire?"

"I knew this guy a couple of years back, had a strap like yours, and always using it on people, tearing up their faces and hands with it. Well, one day the guy lost it, and whoever found it jumped him one night and used it on him."

"So . . . he was careless. I ain't careless." Bill spat at Tommy's feet.

"Bill . . . the story is that guy don't even have a face no more. No face at all."

Bill thought about it, started seeing it in his dreams. His face all torn up like that. He hated Tommy for that story, trying to scare him like that. And Tommy was going to pay for it.

IT WAS BILL'S DEEPEST FEAR. HE WAS HORRIFIED AT THE idea of even the slightest blemish. Ingrown hairs, skin rashes, scratches . . . they repulsed him. He sweated over the intactness of his face, and found himself fantasizing the worst things happening to that precious skin: razors ripping through his cheeks, stones bruising it to pulp over his skullbones, acid melting it down into his collar. He shook . . . he could see his hands visibly shaking merely from the fantasy of it.

Mutilation. The word contained all the magic of hell for him.

"Hey, big man! Pretty boy! Come out! Show us that pretty face, that pretty strap of yours! We'll make ya kiss that strap!"

The younger boys were back out in the street again, hanging around the streetlight below Bills' apartment, staring up at him, making faces, gesturing. Bill didn't like that. He stuck his head out the window.

"I'll tear ya up! I'm warnin' ya!" They enraged him. If there weren't so many of them out there . . . he'd rip their faces off, one at a time. "I'm warnin' ya to get outta here!" He continued to shout, louder and louder, but the shouting quickly shrilled into screams and, embarrassed, Bill slammed the window down again, glaring out the window silently, sullenly, his lips barely controlling the audible snarl seeking its escape.

Little bastards . . .

Then he caught his reflection in the window and smiled, admiring his

handsome face again, as he admired it dozens of times every day. Sleek black hair combed back from a wide, pale brow. Long, straight nose. High cheekbones. Large, blue eyes. His most valued possession, that face.

He glared down at the boys again. Then, his gaze split between their punk looks and his own handsome image, he reached over with his right hand and slipped the strap from the top of his dresser.

Fixing one of the boys with his eyes—Jim, the red-headed one—he drew back the strap and slammed it against the wall next to the window, as hard as he could, imagining the strap catching Jim square between his greasy cheekbones.

Then Bill saw himself pull the strap away from Jim's face, slowly, with effort. Like pulling weeds or chest hair—that's the way it would feel—pulling loose with a wet sound. And the red spreading over Jim's face, creeping up into the roots of his less-red hair.

Bill looked down at the strap: red flakes of paint from the wall caught in the barbs.

HE LAY DOWN THAT NIGHT WITH THE STRAP ON THE floor beside his bed, within easy reach. And dozed restlessly, interrupted again and again by the frightening concerns for his own face.

He was nothing without the face, had never gotten anything—liquor, girls, money—without it.

Hey, Bill! Come share a bottle with us! People liked his looks, and rewarded him for it.

So I'll give ya the job . . . you're a looker, Bill. People buy from a looker! Local merchants would hire him trusting the face. At least for a time, until he robbed them blind.

Girls were the same, although he usually kept the women a bit longer than the jobs. *Come on, Bill! Take me wherever you like, do with me what ya like . . . I just want to be with you!*

I love you, Bill . . . I'll do anything . . .

We love you, Bill . . . we really love you . . .

And the men, the men could be terrified by that face. *No, Bill!* He could control them. *Anything you say!* The face and the strap, they made an unbeatable team. *Bill!*

IT HADN'T ALWAYS BEEN THAT WAY. WHEN HE WAS younger his acne had been horrible. All his buddies, all the young girls made fun of him. In desperation he used to scratch the sores out, but that didn't help—it only made them run, and running together they

made even larger, uglier sores. And in the desperation he'd attack the face with razor blades, slicing off the sores from the surface of his skin. His face bathed in red . . . crimson smeared across the bathroom window . . .

Once he'd even used a pocket knife he'd found in the gutter. But while the others in his classes would look better as the months and years went by, his face would get worse and worse, until it seemed to him he looked quite the Frankenstein, quite the Creature from the Black Lagoon.

Until he met the old doctor, that quack plastic surgeon.

It was a dusty storefront on a rundown sidestreet. *McCormick—Plastic Surgery*. The guy was old, older than he should have been to be cutting people up like that. But Bill sensed something about him.

"Yes, yes, what can I do for you?" The old man looked over his spectacles.

"A face . . . I need a new face . . . sir . . ." He'd acted shy, needy. Bill didn't look the old man in the face, but instead gazed at his own feet, trying to look smaller.

"All you youngsters . . . always wanting new faces! Isn't yours good enough, young man? I should think . . ."

And then Bill started crying, bawling, blubbering about how miserable life was, having a face all torn up like that.

"No girls . . . no friends!" he cried between sobs, choking. And the old man put his arms around him.

He could have forced him to operate on him, could have bullied the old geezer until he agreed to fix his face. But then Bill was smarter than most of his buddies on the street. If he forced the old man, how could he ever trust him to do the job right?

"I'll do it, son . . . I'll do my best . . ."

So the doc did the job and after a little healing it was perfect. The doc was pretty pleased himself, all puffed out and bragging about it, saying it was the best work he'd ever done. Bill wouldn't know about that, but he himself was more than satisfied.

That's about the time Bill first thought of the strap.

He'd had the new face a few weeks then, discovering what it could do for him, how girls looked at him differently now. He'd been walking up the street, looking around at everybody, showing them the face.

"Look out!"

He looked up and something blue whizzed past his nose, smashing into the sidewalk in front of him. He looked down at the blue glass, a million pieces. Glittering, meat-shredding glass all over the place.

Somebody had tried to get the face, to tear it up.

The streets had taught Bill well; when you were afraid of something you faced it head on. You attacked. He made the strap.

First one he thought about was the old doctor. The doc was the only one who knew how he got his new face; what if he should tell everybody? Or what if somebody . . . one of the guys sick with jealousy . . . forced the doc to do something to his face, maybe even take his new face away somehow and bring back the old one? Bill couldn't take any chances.

Bill got him one night before closing. He didn't even get a chance to scream. Fact is the old doc must have had his tongue out when Bill laid the strap into his face. Bill discovered that much when he pried the strap off and the doc fainted. Messed up the old fella's eyes pretty badly too. Bill got a real chuckle over that. He wouldn't be doing any more operations with those eyes. And then Bill rifled the safe. The old man had quite a bit squirrelled away.

Next fellow was his old friend Tommy. Tommy knew Bill was after him, hated him now, and the idiot made the mistake of jumping Bill with a knife one night. The way that blade gleamed, sweeping right by Bill's left cheek . . . it put a terrified rage into him. Bill didn't stop with the face that time; he just kept on working the strap down Tommy's torso, then into the groin. He wasn't gonna try to scare Bill with those stories anymore. No sir! He wouldn't have the mouth for it.

And with every slap of the strap, every sweep of his own private army of meat-eating fish hooks, Bill was thrilled, and terrified near to madness at the same time. He just kept thinking that could be his own face peeling away in hunks and strips down there. It could be. He saw it in his dreams. And that sweet terror kept him swinging the strap all the harder.

There were about a dozen others over the next few years. A couple with acne worse than even Bill had ever had. He felt almost like he was doing those two a favor. Stripping the skin down to bone, giving new, better flesh a chance to grow in. And it felt different pulling that strap away from flesh softened with acne. He always knew it would.

"Hey, lover! Come out! Whatsa matter?"

WHEN BILL WOKE UP THE NEXT MORNING THE BOYS WERE still out there. Hanging out by the streetlight, gesturing, taunting him. They'd been on him for weeks. Maybe it was his age; he'd long been king of the block, getting the prettiest girls—girls who were now much much younger than him, still teenagers really—pulling off the sweetest jobs, and he *was* getting older. The younger guys were starting to make

fun of him.

"Hey, old man! Geezer! Whatsa matter with you, goin' out with them young girls alla time! Cradle-robb'er! Geezer!"

He wasn't going to have it. Especially from that red-headed fellow. Jim. The leader of the young guys. Bill had a surprise for that one all planned out.

When it turned dark they were still there, looking up at Bill's brightly lit window. Taunting him. But Bill wasn't there. Bill was creeping up the alley across the street, behind them.

Bill's strap was swinging in his hand, hungry for young meat.

Bill ran out of the alley into the dim-lit street, the strap overhead and swinging, gathering momentum. The red-headed kid turned and in his surprise, or fear—it must have been fear—the red-headed kid *tripped* . . . right into Bill's legs.

And Bill's meat-gnawing strap flew out of his hand and into the dark.

Bill should have stayed and looked for it, fought the young kids off—he told himself that over and over the next few days. But he didn't. Once he lost the strap, Bill ran.

The next day he was all over the block looking for the strap, beating on people, screaming for his strap. But nobody seemed to know anything. Nobody had seen the younger kids with it, but finally Bill figured they must have it—hiding it from him, maybe even waiting for a chance to use it on him.

BILL HAD THE DREAMS THEN—*BELIEVE IT!* THE SLAPPING of that strap up and down the street—ripping into brick, gnawing into wood, tearing chunks out of plaster and cement alike—stalking, hungry for the face. Bill's own face.

He slept with the light on. He kept a gun by the bed now. But he really didn't think that would help him. He'd look into the mirror and the face would stare back frightened, dark hollows under the deep blue eyes and an occasional tremor passing over those handsome lips.

And if he listened real hard, at night when there wasn't so much background noise, he could hear the strap slapping, gnawing, its steady hungry pace bringing it closer to Bill every night. Bill would run to the window, staring out and looking for the kids, but he would never see anybody. There'd be no one in the streets at all, no one. Just the roaring wind and that steady slapping. As if everybody in the neighborhood knew it was dangerous to be out. As if they knew the strap was out, and stalking for meat. For faces.

He'd feel the strap kissing his cheeks, and wake up in a cold sweat.

He'd feel the strap feeding on his neck, and discover his own hands clawing beneath his chin.

The way the kids told it later, the red-headed boy came to Bill's place to make peace. He was going to tell Bill they'd all heard the strap slapping out in the darkness, and they figured it was Bill with his strap back, out looking for them. They were half scared to death.

But when the red-headed kid came to Bill's door that night, and Bill opened it, Bill didn't see the fear in the boy's face, he just saw that the boy had one hand hidden behind his back. Bill screamed and slammed the door.

There was a balcony one floor beneath his window. Bill must have figured he could just open the window, jump out, and land on that balcony, making his escape that way.

But when he opened the window something big and black with silver teeth flew out of the night and latched onto Bill's face, just like a vampire bat in one of the Bela Lugosi films that used to scare him so badly.

Blinded, Bill staggered back several steps before he realized what it really was. And he had to admire it, his own craftsmanship, how evenly he had sewn those hooks, so they felt like one great big claw in his skin. They had all entered his flesh at the same time so that he couldn't pick out the pain of any individual hook.

And even in the pain Bill was still smart. Even in all that flaming pain he was busy figuring, wondering if he could find some doctor who might remove the strap a hook at a time, maybe someone as skilled as the old doc had been, so that when the hooks were removed there were just all these little holes, that maybe the doctor could fill the holes with something so that eventually Bill's face would look just as good as new.

When he heard a noise that *might* have been his own screaming filling the room surrounding him. But which he realized was merely the roaring of the wind, the wind he had heard every night accompanying the steady slapping of his strap as it made its way through the empty streets toward Bill's window. Coming to face him down, even some score.

But then the wind was pulling at the end of the strap, lifting it the way a hand might. And only *then* did Bill hear the sound of his own scream as his precious face, his most handsome face, began to leave him.



She froze with terror as the man came towards her, weapon in hand. She was alone, on a deserted stretch of road—and there was no escape!

The Night Stalker

by JIM GILMORE

BEFORE HE LEFT FOR WORK AT THE HOSPITAL, JEFF warned her to stay home. In his half-kidding, half-serious way her husband said, "Don't take chances, Annie. With a maniac on the loose, do your shopping in the daytime."

Easy for him to say. I work all day. When do I have time to shop except at night or on weekends?

Jeff didn't have to warn her about the Night Stalker. The madman had every woman in Lansing frightened half to death. But there hadn't been a killing in weeks, not since the first snowfall. A local psychiatrist had predicted the Night Stalker probably wouldn't strike again until spring. Besides, he had never attacked a woman on the north side of

town, so she felt safe enough on the mile and a half drive to the Mall.

I wish Jeff didn't have to work every night in the emergency room. Oh, well, just one more year and he'll be through with medical school. Then we can settle down to a more normal life.

THE SHOPPING TRIP WAS JUST AN EXCUSE TO GET OUT. All she needed were a few staples: flour, sugar, bread, and Jeff's staple, beer. There were few customers in the supermarket that night, so she was in and out of the store in less than five minutes. Outside the entrance, she noticed the man at the pay phone, a big man in a deer hunter's cap and a striped Mackinaw coat. He seemed quite agitated as he spoke on the phone.

Sure hate to meet him in a dark alley!

She hurried across the all-but-deserted lot to her battered Rabbit. For once she was glad the lock on the driver's side didn't work. If the door had been locked she would have had to put down the groceries to get out her keys. She opened the door and slid the bag and six pack across the seat.

"Hey, lady!" she heard a man's voice shout.

Looking up, she saw the man in the deer hunter's cap running across the lot toward her car. *My God, what does he want? There isn't another soul in the parking lot.* She jumped behind the wheel and slammed the door shut. *Darn lock. Why didn't we ever get it fixed?* The running man was just a few rows away. She jammed her key into the ignition. The engine, still warm, started right up. *Oh, Jeff, why didn't I listen to you?* She saw there was no car in the space ahead of her. Ramming the shift into low, she stepped on the gas and let out the clutch. The man yanked at the door as the car shot ahead.

"Lady!" he bellowed. "For chrissake, stop!"

No, no, no, no! The parking lot had been plowed, but a thin layer of ice and snow coated the asphalt. She heard the man's fist beating on the window. He was hanging on to the door handle, sliding along on the ice.

"Let go!" she screamed. "Let go!"

"Stop! Stop!" he shouted back.

The back wheels of the Rabbit hit a patch of glazed ice. She felt the rear end of the car skid to the right. Then the wheels hit dry asphalt. The car straightened with a lurch, and the man lost his grip on the door handle. In the rear view mirror, she saw him tumble end over end on the ice. Instinctively, she braked, thinking she might have injured him seriously. In the mirror, she saw him scramble back to his feet. *Go, go, go, you fool! He's crazy! Don't worry about him!*

She stepped on the gas and shifted to second. The lot was huge, almost four blocks square. She knew she should call the police, but where? If she stopped anywhere in the Mall, the man might catch her before the police could arrive. *No, I've got to get out of here. Call from some place safe.* She knew of a motel and bar half a mile or so down Grand River. She would call the police from there.

THE TRAFFIC SIGNAL AT THE MALL EXIT WAS RED. SHE braked to a stop and glanced up at the mirror. There was no sign of the man or another car behind her. She patiently sat there, waiting for the light to change, and her legs began to shake. It had been a very close call. Or had it? Ever since she was a little girl, she had let her imagination run away from her. She began to feel more foolish than frightened.

Poor guy probably just wanted to ask directions. I could have killed him. What made me lose control? Why did I think he was the Night Stalker? He must have thought I was crazy!

But the adrenalin wouldn't stop pumping. Her mind raced, trying to remember everything she had read and heard about the Night Stalker. Since the end of September, he had murdered three women. All his victims were killed at night, stabbed repeatedly with a hunting knife. The first woman had been found near the university, the second was slain in a residential neighborhood on the southside of town, the third woman's body was found in her car on a lovers' lane by the river on the east side.

Come to think of it, all three victims were found slain in their cars. Did the killer stalk them in shopping mall parking lots, then drive them to the murder locations? Come on light, change. This has to be the longest traffic signal in town!

There was a flash of light in her rear view mirror. She looked up and saw a pick-up truck driving toward her. *Don't panic. It's probably not him.* The flash came again. The driver was blinking his lights off and on. *Oh, God, it's him! Don't panic. Not now.* Her eyes darted to the right and the left, looking to see if Grand River was clear. The only headlights were blocks away. She pressed down on the gas pedal, deciding not to wait for the light to change. *It'll be just my luck to get a ticket.* She laughed. With a maniac chasing her, she would be only too happy to have a police car pull her over for running the light.

INSTINCTIVELY SHE TURNED WEST, TOWARD HOME AND safety, then realized the motel and bars were the other way. The direction she was headed there was a Texaco station within the next

mile and the way things were going it would be closed. She looked in the rear view mirror again. The pick-up had jumped the light, too, and was right behind her and the Rabbit was already up to 60! The speed limit on that stretch was 45. If only a police car would see them. *There's never a cop around when you need one!*

She saw the Texaco station on the opposite side of the road as the Rabbit roared past it. Except for the phone booth out front, all the lights were out. *There's never a gas station open when you need one either!* Grand River was four lanes wide. The pick-up pulled up next to her in the inside lane and began honking its horn, trying to force her car over. She slammed on her brakes, and when the rear of the pick-up cleared her front bumper, turned the wheel hard to the right. The Rabbit spun around, out of control, and skidded backwards across the opposite lanes. With a dull crunch, it crashed into the drift the plows had made at the side of the road, rear-end first. The sudden stop killed the engine. There was another long screech and a crash. She looked out her side window and saw the pick-up had also skidded across the road and plowed into the drift about one hundred yards to the west. Its engine roared. She heard its back wheels spinning on ice. It sounded like it was stuck. If only it would stay stuck and the Rabbit would start. She turned the key in the ignition. The engine caught on the first turn. She stepped on the gas. The front wheels were on dry pavement. With a screech of burning rubber, the Rabbit pulled out of the drift. *Thank God for front wheel drive!*

ANNIE STARTED EAST ON GRAND RIVER WITH THE PICK-up's wheel still screaming on ice. But something was wrong with the Rabbit. There was a thump, thump in the rear end and she couldn't get it above five miles an hour. The crash had either blown a tire or bent the fender against the wheel. *Damn, damn, damn!* She burst into tears and began to pound the steering wheel with her hands. The car was moving, but just barely. Then through her tears she saw the lights of the phone booth next to the curb in front of the Texaco station. At least she could call the police. She stopped right next to the booth and jumped out of the car and found the passenger's side was just inches from the booth's door. *It's too close. I don't think I can squeeze through. Well, I've got to try!* She sucked in her breath and managed to squeeze into the booth, sliding the door shut behind her. Down the road, she saw the headlights of the pick-up begin to move. It was pulling slowly out of the drift. She lifted the receiver. *Oh, no, I left my purse in the car! I don't have any change.* She turned toward the door, and with horror, saw the headlights of the pick-up bearing down on the

booth. It screeched to a stop on the opposite side of the Rabbit.

He's getting out! Oh, please, somebody help me! She was frozen with terror as the man in the deer hunting cap stalked to the back of the Rabbit. He was carrying a rifle. Her knees almost buckled. *It's got to be the Night Stalker. Why's he looking in the back of my car? Doesn't he see me? Oh, God, he's looking at me now. I've got to get out of here!*

She clawed at the door. There was a metallic bang as the door on the passenger's side of the Rabbit bumped against the side of the booth. She couldn't believe her eyes. *There's another man. In the back of my car. How on earth did he get in there?* The car door banged against the booth again. She backed up against the pay phone, wide-eyed. *What on earth is going on?* The man was frantically trying to get out of her car. But the Rabbit was too close to the booth. The car door wouldn't open more than a few inches. The man inside swore and lunged for the driver's side door, but the pick-up had pulled in so close that door wouldn't open either. The man crawled over the front seat and began to pound on the inside of the windshield with his fists. The windshield cracked, but the safety glass held. He was trapped. When he finally realized it, he put back his head and began to howl like an animal.

THE DRIVER OF THE PICK-UP CAME UP TO THE DOOR OF the booth and grinned at Annie. "Man's crazy," he said. "Seen him get into your car back at the Mall. Called the police, but you came out when I was on the phone. Tried to stop you."

"I know." Annie closed her eyes. Everything was spinning. She had to hang onto the phone booth to steady herself.

"You damn near killed me back there," the man went on, oblivious to her distress. "Tried to signal you with my lights. But you kept right on going. Figured as long as I kept on your bumper he'd lay low. Good thing you pulled in so close to the booth. Together we got him." He laughed. "Been deer hunting all day. Didn't bag a thing. Guess this makes up for it."

Annie held out her hand. "Got a dime?"

"Sure thing." He fished in his pocket and handed her a dime. "Say, you all right?"

Annie smiled and nodded and put the dime in the slot and dialed 911. Her hands shook. *He was in the back of my car all the time!*

One of them—the mother or the brother—was guilty of murder. But which one? And why would either of them want to see the victim dead?

The Investigator

by JACK RITCHIE

I APPROACHED THE SCENE OF THE CRIME AGAIN, WALKING around the body, searching the tall grass for some clue, some hint as to which one of them might have killed him. I knelt beside the victim.

He lay on his side, his head badly crushed by the heavy blows that had killed him. In life he had been a tall, fine-looking man with black hair and blue eyes. Now he would return to the dust.

I looked up at the other two. The woman and the son. One of them had committed the murder and they were now waiting for me to decide which one of them it was.

The mother?

I did not want to think that, but yes, she could have killed him. She was small, almost fragile, and yet she could have swung the club. She could have approached him silently when he was unaware of her presence and she could have struck again and again until he was dead.

But if she had killed him, why? What reason could she have had?

Had he done or said something that had enraged her? Or had there been some wrong over which she had brooded for years until finally she could tolerate it no longer?

I looked at the son. He was muscular, powerful. And one could almost tell from his appearance, his sullen bearing, that he had been a spoiled moody child. He scowled, even now.

I stood up and wiped my forehead. It was quite warm out here in this field.

Yes, one of them was guilty of murder. But now another possibility came to my mind. Could it be that *both* of them were responsible for the death? The one distracting the victim while the other struck?

But again why? Why would both of them want to see him dead?

This was clearly a crime of fury, of passion. What exactly had happened here? I tried to imagine, to reconstruct, the events preceding the murder.

Why had the victim come to this particular spot? I looked toward the hills. It was obvious that he had come from that direction. Down the hills and along the faint path between the trees. He had crossed the plowed field. His footprints on the bare soil indicated that. He had come to this strip of tall grass. And then what? Had one of the two been waiting for him? Or both? Had the murderer been waiting for him here and spoken to him, drawing his attention, while the other approached from the rear and raised the club?

I studied the woman. There was something in her eyes that made you realize that she could do almost anything. Even talk someone else into doing what both of them knew was mortally wrong.

She said she had discovered the body. It had been noon, with the sun almost directly overhead. She had come upon the body and she had touched nothing. Everything was just as she had found it.

Now she spoke. "We can't leave him lying out here."

"No," I said. "I'll be just a little while longer."

Feet other than the victim's had trod on this grass, but it had sprung back up again leaving no trace of the murderer's presence.

The murderer had used this long strip of grass beside the plowed field to get to this point. If he had done so with the purpose of concealing his footprints, it meant that he had come here with the cold-blooded intent to kill. He had planned the crime.

Or was it possible that this was simply the natural way to get here? I myself had used the strip to avoid walking over the rain-dampened field. Then had there been no premeditation? Had the killing resulted from a dispute that had flared out of hand?

My eyes returned to the body. It was difficult to tell just exactly how

long he had been dead. She said she had last seen him alive and well early this morning.

I had already questioned both of them, and each had denied any knowledge of the crime. When I had spoken to her she had regarded me quietly and there had been something in eyes that I had not quite been able to fathom. As though there was something she, in turn, wanted to ask me, but dared not.

I now took the blanket and gently wrapped it around the body. I lifted it to my shoulder. She followed me to the house.

When I put down the body inside, I looked at her again. There was grief in her face and something else. And now I saw what it was that she had wanted to ask me. She wanted to know if it was *I* who had killed him.

I was shocked and angry that she should think such a thing and in my anger I went out looking for the boy.

I found him in a glen in the forest, his face frightened and turned up to the sky.

I heard the voice speak to him.

“Where is Abel thy brother?”

He answered, “I know not. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

And my oldest son, Cain, was banished from our land.

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

A member of the Honolulu police department, he's a Chinese-Hawaiian who delights in quoting aphorisms. Who is this fictional detective?

He's Charlie Chan, created by author Earl Derr Biggers.

What was the real name of Arthur Conan Doyle?

The real name of Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, was Arthur Conan Doyle.

In a series of mystery films made during the forties, actor Warner Baxter portrayed a medical detective named Dr. Robert Ordway. What was the overall name of the series?

The name of the series was The Crime Doctor.

SHERLOCK HOLMES QUIZ

Choose the word that will correctly complete these Sherlock Holmes titles!

1. THE GARRIDEBS
a) FIVE b) TWO c) THREE d) FOUR
2. THE HOUSE
a) FULL b) HAUNTED c) EMPTY d) BIG
3. THE FOOT
a) ANGEL'S b) DEVIL'S c) TWISTED d) LIMPING
4. THE MAN
a) THIN b) COCKY c) CREEPING d) CROOKED
5. THE BEECHES
a) SUNSA b) COPPER c) SEVEN d) BLOODY
6. THE BOX
a) CARDBOARD b) TIN c) CIGAR d) GOLDEN
7. THE GABLES
a) THREE b) SEVEN c) GARBLED d) CLARK
8. THE OF LADY FRANCES CARFAX
a) MURDER b) SECRET c) DISAPPEARANCE d) SCANDAL
9. THE BLAZE
a) ABBEY b) GOLDEN c) SCARLET d) SILVER
10. THE BOSCOME VALLEY
a) CASE b) PAPERS c) PROBLEM d) MYSTERY

ANSWERS

1. THREE 2. EMPTY 3. DEVIL'S 4. CREEPING OR CROOKED
5. COPPER 6. CARDBOARD 7. THREE 8. DISAPPEARANCE
9. SILVER 10. MYSTERY

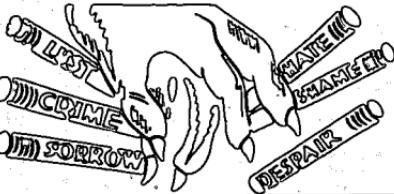


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WILD PARTIES
UNLEASHED PASSIONS!



—Ad for the movie *Reefer Madness* (1939)

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Edward Goldstein, Publisher

*Jimmy wanted to go straight, but the cop wouldn't let him.
If he pulled this job, he'd go straight all right—straight
back to prison!*

Little Sister

by MEL WASHBURN

WHEN JIMMY TOMSZAC GOT OFF THE BUS FROM Stateville, he didn't expect any brass bands to meet him. His old buddies from the neighborhood were all either dead or in prison or on parole, which prohibited them from consorting with known felons like Jimmy. His little sister Paula had quit writing to him a month ago, and his lady friend April, he heard, had moved uptown where she was keeping company with Eddie Mangiaracina, the respectable mobster. So he didn't expect any greeting committee with trumpets and flowers.

But there was, nevertheless, someone at the bus terminal waiting to

meet him. It was Red Sawicki, the most muscular cop in the city and one of the meanest. He always wore a homburg hat to make himself look important, and he had to have his suitcoats special-made, cut extra broad through the shoulders and extra roomy on the left side to accommodate a nickel-plated .357 he carried there, right next to his heart. "How ya doing, jailbird?" he asked quietly as Jimmy tried to walk past, pretending not to notice him.

"Pretty good, Red. How are you?"

"I'm okay. And it's *Lieutenant* Sawicki to you, chump. You ain't a free man, so don't get cocky. Just one little violation and your parole's revoked. Remember that?"

"I remember," said Jimmy sullenly.

"Bright young man." The redhead grinned sarcastically. "But then you always were the brainy sort. Only made one small mistake in your entire criminal career."

"Yeah, well . . ." Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. "One mistake was enough, I guess."

"No, it wasn't. They got a revolving door up at Stateville for guys like you." Red laughed. "But enough of this chit-chat. I want us to have a serious talk. Come on." He led Jimmy through the crowded terminal to a dark coffee shop and found a booth way in the back where they couldn't be overheard. "Park your Kroger suitcase and sit down. I'll be back."

Jimmy set down the brown grocery bag into which the guards had packed his personal belongings that morning, and then he settled unhappily into the corner of the booth, trying hard to imagine what Sawicki wanted from him. *It must be unfinished business from before I went into the joint*, he thought. But what business?

SAWICKI HAD BEEN A COP IN JIMMY'S NEIGHBORHOOD for as long as Jimmy could remember. And he'd had his huge, stubby fingers deep into every shady operation in the area. He'd started as a patrolman, fencing stolen auto parts out of the trunk in his squad car, and woe unto the garage owner who didn't do business with him. Then as a detective he'd sold protection to the hookers and the policy operators up and down the street. He'd acted as a collector for the loan sharks. And finally, rumor had it, he'd been running his own rackets as a sort of subcontractor for the Mob. He was a crooked cop with a capital double-C, yet with all the nets and snares he had spread across the neighborhood, Sawicki had never been able to entangle Jimmy, at least not that Jimmy knew about. So what could he want with Jimmy his first day out of the joint?

"What I want," said Sawicki as he set two cups of steaming coffee on the tabletop and slid into the booth opposite Jimmy, "is to do some business with you."

"I ain't doing that kind of business any more," said Jimmy flatly, knowing for certain that Sawicki could have only one kind of business in mind. "I made up my mind while I was in the joint. I'd rather starve."

"But Jimmy," urged Sawicki, "you were the best safe cracker in the neighborhood. Even I couldn't catch you at anything, until you made that one small mistake. Nature gave you a real talent, and you got to use it."

"No, I don't." Jimmy started to slide out of the booth, but with a powerful shove, Sawicki pushed the table against Jimmy, pinning him to the back of his seat.

"You don't leave class until I say you're excused, meathead. You understand?"

"Yeah, I do," gasped Jimmy, the edge of the tabletop squeezing the breath out of him.

"Yeah you do." Sawicki eased off the pressure on the tabletop. "So listen. I want you to break a box for me. If it'll make your conscience any easier, I can tell you that most of the cash in that box is mine, so it won't be exactly like stealing."

"If it's yours, how come I got to crack a safe to get it for you?"

"I'm in partnership with a guy. I want to liquidate my holdings, but he ain't agreeable. So I got to take extreme measures."

"Mind telling me who the partner is?"

"I shouldn't, really, because it's none of your stinking business. But I'm going to any way, because it might give you extra incentive. The guy is 'Respectable Eddie' Mangiaracina, the same monkey who's been cozy with your old flame, April Kelly."

Jimmy raised his hands slowly above his head in a gesture of surrender. "You better lean into that table again until you squeeze the life right out of me, Sawicki, because I ain't going back into the burglary business, especially not if it involves premeditated suicide. When Eddie Mangiaracina gets mad at somebody, he sends them for a ride they don't come back from."

"Hsst. Knock it off." Sawicki looked around warily. "Put your hands down, will you?" Jimmy put his hands down. "I ain't going to coerce you into this deal. I need your wholehearted cooperation."

"Well, if that's what you need, you better find another boy. Like I told you, I made up my mind, no more night work."

Sawicki sighed. "Well, I hate to do this, but you leave me no

choice." From somewhere inside his suitcoat he drew out a sealed plastic bag containing a pearl-handled twenty-two pistol. "You recognize this weapon?"

"It looks kind of like . . ."

"Not kind of like. It is. It's the gun your sister Paula always carried in her purse because she's afraid of muggers. It's got her fingerprints all over it. And not only that, but ballistics tests will show that this is the gun that put three slugs into Mike Lowack, her not-so-faithful boyfriend."

"Oh, come on!" Jimmy exclaimed in disbelief. "Get off it, Sawicki." It was true, he thought, that Paula had an awful temper. And Mike had been known to run around behind her back. But even so, "That can't be true."

"No, it's true. Mike's in the hospital, doing fine. And he won't tell us who shot him. Still loves her, I guess. But I know who did it, and I could arrest her any time I wanted." Sawicki smiled. "You can ask her yourself, if you don't believe me."

"I will, as soon as I see her." Jimmy started to get out of the booth again, and this time Sawicki didn't stop him.

"Why wait?" said the redhead. "Call her on the phone." He laid a slip of paper on the table. "There's the number she can be reached at."

Jimmy looked at the slip. "That's long distance."

"Oh yeah . . ." Sawicki dug into his pocket and brought out a handful of change. "I forgot, they don't give you guys no real money when they spring you, just a check for fifty dollars and a bus ticket. Here, call your sister. Ask if the old Redman hasn't been extra helpful, concealing the evidence and getting her out of town and all."

Jimmy took the slip and the coins and went looking for a phone booth.

THE SAFE THAT SAWICKI WANTED JIMMY TO crack was in the office in the back of a pool hallway out in the suburbs. They drove out there about two A. M. in Sawicki's personal car, a long, shiny Continental. Jimmy had given Sawicki a list of the tools he'd need, and the big redhead brought them along in a heavy canvas bag.

The pool hall was closed for the night, of course; the street in front of it was deserted; and in fact the entire suburban town seemed to be asleep; there wasn't a car moving on the streets, not a light burning in any window.

"What a hick burg," said Sawicki contemptuously. "You could swipe the lamp posts right off the street corners tonight and nobody'd

know the difference."

When Jimmy took a vinyl strip out of the bag and began to work on the lock to the back door, Sawicki stopped him. "Let me save you some trouble." He unlocked the door with one of a bunch of keys he took from his pocket.

"If you've got the key to the door," Jimmy whispered when they'd gotten safely inside, "how come you don't have the combination for the safe?"

"My partner trusts me, but I guess he don't trust me completely." Sawicki screwed up his face in a look of mock sadness. "Ain't it awful how suspicious some guys are? Little things like that are what breaks up even the most harmonious of partnerships." He led Jimmy up a narrow stairway and into a large, panelled office. "Here's the box." He closed the drapes of the room's only window and turned on a floor lamp next to the polished steel safe.

"What a beautiful thing," admired Jimmy.

"Never mind that. Can you bust it?"

"Yeah, sure." Jimmy spent a few minutes carefully listening to the tumblers with a stethoscope. "It'll take me about an hour."

"Okay. Okay." Sawicki seemed distracted. "Just get it done." He went back to the window and peered cautiously out between the drapes. "Oh crap!"

"What is it?"

Sawicki didn't answer, but just held the drapes apart, allowing the intermittent flash of a red light to shine up into the room from the alley below.

"The cops?" asked Jimmy.

"Yeah, the cops. My partner must have had a silent alarm installed on the back door without telling me. Ain't that suspicion for you?"

"What are we going to do?"

Sawicki thought a moment, then reached into his suitcoat and took out a big, nickel-plated automatic. "You are going to lift your hands, chump. And I am going to arrest you. It's a lucky thing I happened by here and seen you entering the back door."

"Red, you can't . . ." Jimmy pleaded. "I mean, I just got out of the joint this morning. Isn't there any other way?"

"Maybe there is, but I don't have a lot of time to think about what it might be. If you play along with my story, I'll testify for you at your trial, be a character witness. But if you don't play along, I'll arrest you anyway and throw in a couple of extra charges, maybe stretch your sentence into the next century. Like for instance, those tools you're using . . ."

"They're stolen," Jimmy guessed sadly.

"Of course they are. But I ain't going to mention it, if you don't cross me."

"Well, all right." Jimmy raised his hands.

A MINUTE LATER THEY HEARD MUFFLED FOOTSTEPS and cautious whisperings on the stairway, and then a pair of men in blue uniforms inched their way into the room, holding their service revolvers straight out before them with both hands. "Just drop that cannon, fella," one of them said unsteadily to the mountainous Sawicki. "Drop it double quick." A third cop crept into the room, aiming a large, black shotgun in Sawicki's direction.

"Okay, take it easy." Sawicki grinned and let his .357 drop to the floor. "Let's not anybody get hurt, okay?"

"Spare us your smart mouth," said the nervous cop, feeling bolder now that Sawicki was disarmed.

"Hey look, you guys," said the redhead. "You got this wrong. I'm a cop myself. Lieutenant Sawicki. I seen thes perpetrator entering the premises, and I come in behind him to make the collar."

"Bull," said the cop with the shotgun.

"No, really. Here's my badge." Sawicki started to reach into his coat.

"Hold it, fella!" the first cop almost shrieked.

"Okay. Okay." Sawicki raised his hands above his head.

"Pat him down, Archie."

The second cop holstered his pistol and, making a wide circle around the room so as to stay out of the line of fire between his colleagues and Sawicki, he came up behind the redhead and began gingerly feeling inside his coat. "Well, lookit here," he said as he took out the little pearl-handled pistol in the plastic bag. "This guy's a walking arsenal."

"I'll be darned," said the guy with the shotgun. "What do you suppose the plastic bag's for?"

"Don't leave any fingerprints that way, I bet," said the nervous cop wisely.

"Oh, for pity sake," said Sawicki in disgust. "Of all the hick town, numbskull . . . that little heater's evidence in a felony case, you boobs, and if you foul it up, I swear, when this thing's all over I'm going to . . ."

"Just save the innocent act," said the cop with the shotgun. "Put the cuffs on him, Archie."

"Oh, boy!" said Sawicki, but he let Archie handcuff him. "This is going to be awfully embarrassing to you guys later, I'm telling you."

"Yeah, sure. Let's go," said the first cop, no longer very nervous at all. "And you," he said to Jimmy, "you pack up those tools and bring them along. And no funny stuff."

THE THREE COPS LED SAWICKI AND JIMMY CAREFULLY down the stairs and out into the alley behind the pool hall, where a big white car sat with a red flashing light mounted on the dashboard. "Get in, big fella," the formerly nervous cop told Sawicki. "Archie, you take this other guy around front of the building and put him in your squad. We'll see you at the station." He got in behind the wheel, and then the guy with the shotgun got in on the other side, keeping his weapon aimed steadily at Sawicki's head.

"You be careful with that," quipped Sawicki. "We don't want any accidents."

"Don't you worry about accidents," said the guy levelly. And then with a squeal of tires the white car roared away down the alley, leaving Archie and Jimmy in a cloud of dust and grit.

Jimmy set the heavy bag of tools down. "You can keep these things if you want to," he told Archie. "I won't be needing them."

"Well, safecracking ain't exactly my line, but I guess I better haul them away." From his jacket pocket Archie took the little pistol in the plastic bag and handed it to Jimmy. "Eddie said you was to have this."

"Thanks. Let's be getting out of here before the real cops show up."

Archie picked up the bag of tools and began to walk away. "Oh, one more thing."

"Yeah, what?"

"Eddie says he's grateful and everything, but don't you ever phone April again. It makes him jealous."

"He's got no cause. I just figured if I tried to phone him personally, he wouldn't even take the call."

"Yeah, he figured that was what you figured. And you were right, which is the only reason you ain't going on the ride with Sawicki. But next time you got business, he'd like you to call him direct."

"I don't think there'll be a next time."

"He'd probably like that even better. Know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I do."

The two men walked away down the alley in opposite directions. ●

SHERLOCK HOLMES QUIZ

Choose the word that will correctly complete these Sherlock Holmes titles!

1. THE _____ FACE
a) UNHAPPY b) YELLOW c) NOBLE d) DISTORTED
2. THE _____ LODGER
a) VEILED b) MISSING c) GREEK d) SECOND
3. THE _____ STUDENTS
a) SIX b) FOUR c) THREE d) TEN
4. THE _____ CLERK
a) NAVAL b) SUSPICIOUS c) DISGRUNTLED
5. THE _____ CYCLIST
a) KILLER b) DEMENTED c) FAT d) SOLITARY
6. THE _____ NAPOLEONS
a) STOLEN b) FORGED c) SILVER d) SIX
7. THE _____ STAIN
a) DIFFICULT b) SECOND c) PERMANENT d) SPECKLED
8. THE _____ COLOURMAN
a) RETIRED b) DANCING c) DYING d) SUSSEX
9. THE _____ PATIENT
a) RESIDENT b) FINAL c) LAST d) RED-HEADED
10. THE _____ CIRCLE
a) SILVER b) BLACK c) RED d) CROOKED

ANSWERS

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|----------|------------------|-------------|--------|-----------|------------|-------------|---------|
| 1. YELLOW | 2. VEILED | 3. THREE | 4. STOCKBROKER'S | 5. SOLITARY | 6. SIX | 7. SECOND | 8. RETIRED | 9. RESIDENT | 10. RED |
|-----------|-----------|----------|------------------|-------------|--------|-----------|------------|-------------|---------|

Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

If you are looking for an outstanding crime novel, you will find it in *A Cold Mind* by David L. Lindsey. With almost terrifying realism this book will take you right into the middle of an investigation of a series of brutal murders done by a method that may be unique in the literature. The strong feeling of presence is intensified by the detailed use of the city of Houston background. The identity of the murderer becomes evident midway through the work, but this is immaterial compared to the detailed detective work done by homicide investigator Stuart Haydon of the HPD. Once again it is a series of expensive call girls who are the victims, but the writing is so expert the use of an old device seems brand new. Only a final twist inserted by the author fails to come off; otherwise here is a superior book all the way. (Harper and Row, \$13.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Charles Larson is a reformed TV writer who is now a novelist, and a notably readable one. He brings back his TV producer/detective Nils Blixen in his latest work *The Portland Murders*, which takes place in that Oregon city. When a thirty-year-old driveway is dug up it is discovered that someone included a corpse in the concrete mix. A determined policeman gets on it, causing the chief suspect (female) to call on her old friend Blixen for help. While the investigation unfolds, we are also treated to some inside glimpses of the TV industry and the kind of personalities it attracts. An engaging entertainment. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Toronto is the scene of Eric Wright's debut novel, *The Night The God Smiled*.

Here we meet Inspector Charlie Salter who is in the doghouse for

having backed the unsuccessful candidate for Deputy Chief. Then he accidentally gets a real case when the Montreal authorities ask for cooperation and he is assigned. Before the book is finished the story moves through the groves of academe where Salter encounters all too human petty frustrations and absurdities, onto social acceptable squash courts, and into the Toronto Police Department. This is considerably better than the average first novel of which only the best are usually chosen for publication. (Scribner's, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Another remarkably good first novel is Ted Wood's *Dead in the Water*.

Set in Murphy's Harbour, Ontario, it features the entire police department consisting of Chief Reid Bennett who is an experienced cop and Vietnam vet, a crippled civilian, and a police dog who nearly runs away with the whole thing. When Bennett rescues a gang rape victim while off duty and kills two of her attackers in the process, the resulting static causes him to resign from the Toronto PD. After that the job in Murphy's Harbour, a tourist spot, is pretty tame. But then murder is done and Bennett goes to work with the aid of Sam, the superior dog, while his civilian employee holds down the office. This book will make you want to look for the sequel; Bennett and Sam are remarkable people who will hold your interest all the way. (Scribners, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Bill Pronzini is an experienced craftsman who both writes on his own and in collaboration with a number of other professionals. His principal character is a private eye who is nameless, the same device that was used by Len Deighton until the movies dubbed his man Harry Palmer. In *Bindlestiff* Pronzini sends his detective after a mature railroad buff who had deliberately taken up the life of a hobo. Before the dust settles there are several killings, one of which is highly visible, but entails a new device in a crime story. There are no great surprises, but the action is close and good. The detective collects pulp magazines, as does his creator. There is a deft reference to Sharon McCone, another private eye who is the creation of fellow San Francisco author Marcia Muller. This is strictly an entertainment, but as such it is a good one. (St. Martin's, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

A lot of fun can be had from a new game book called *Photo Crimes* in which you are invited to help solve some of "Inspector Black's" cases. Of added interest is the fact that many of the photographs were posed by The Comets, the amateur dramatic society of Scotland Yard. The clues are all given with some of the cases easy, some difficult.

There is a scoring system and if you're stuck, there are clues to be consulted, with a penalty if you need to do so. Then there is a section called The Truth in which the solutions are given. Unfortunately, the solutions are keyed to letters and a very careful examination failed to turn up any connection between the letters and the cases given. To find the right solution you have to search for it and inevitably read the answers to some other cases in the process. Apart from this flaw, this book offers a great deal of challenging mystery entertainment. (Simon and Schuster, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

The latest anthology in the continuing series taken from Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine is called *Lost Men*. It was put together by Miss Eleanor Sullivan, a very talented lady who is an author herself and a brilliant editor. There is no one better fitted to carry on the tradition of these anthologies and, as usual, she has done a fine job. These are all stories about missing people, including the Graham Greene classic *The Third Man*. This volume contains a lot of good crime reading for your money. (The Dial Press, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

PAPERBACK NOTES: It is remarkable how many of the current crop of crime paperbacks are British. S.T. Haymon's *Death and the Pregnant Virgin* is now available in paperback from Bantam at \$2.75 . . . Also from Bantam Margaret Erskine's *Case With Three Husbands* at \$2.50 and an original by Thomas Altman called *Black Christmas*. Altman is a pseudonym of Campbell Black. \$2.95 . . . Avon offers Robert J. Randisi's latest work, *The Steinway Collection*. It's not about pianos, but a prize collection of pulp magazines that's been stolen. Private eye Miles Jacoby is back on the job. \$2.75 . . . Another Avon original is *Sleepwalker* by David Combs, a new entry in the Jekyll and Hyde category, \$2.95 . . . Holt Rinehart has reprinted Patricia Moyes' *Season of Snows and Sins* in paperback for \$3.95, a bit high for a slim volume despite the author's reputation . . . Academy of Chicago has imported Colin Wilson's *Ritual in the Dark*, a modern day Jack the Ripper story of murder that is thoroughly impressive in plot and execution (no pun intended). The \$5.95 price is justified by the length of the book and the cost of import . . . Gold Eagle keeps up its reputation for high action with two new entries, *The Centaur Conspiracy* by Carl Stevens and *The Barrabbas Run* by Jack Hild. If blood and thunder adventure is your dish, both of these volumes supply lots of it at \$2.25 each.

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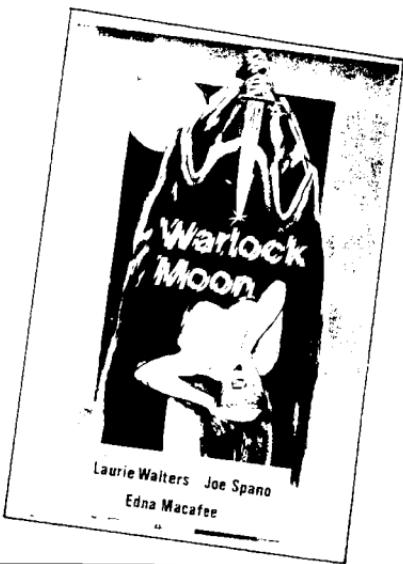
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